NOVEL
5
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LONER LIFE
IN ANOTHER WORLD

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SHIELD GIRL
Equipment MIRROR GREAT SHIELD
CLASS REP
Equipment THUNDERBOLT CHAIN WHIP
QUEEN BEE
Equipment ETERNAL ICE SPEAR

“Waaaaaaah!”
VICE REP B
“Stop groping me!
Stop shaking and grabbing me!
Stop, don’t look, Haruka-kun!”

LONER LIFE
IN ANOTHER WORLD

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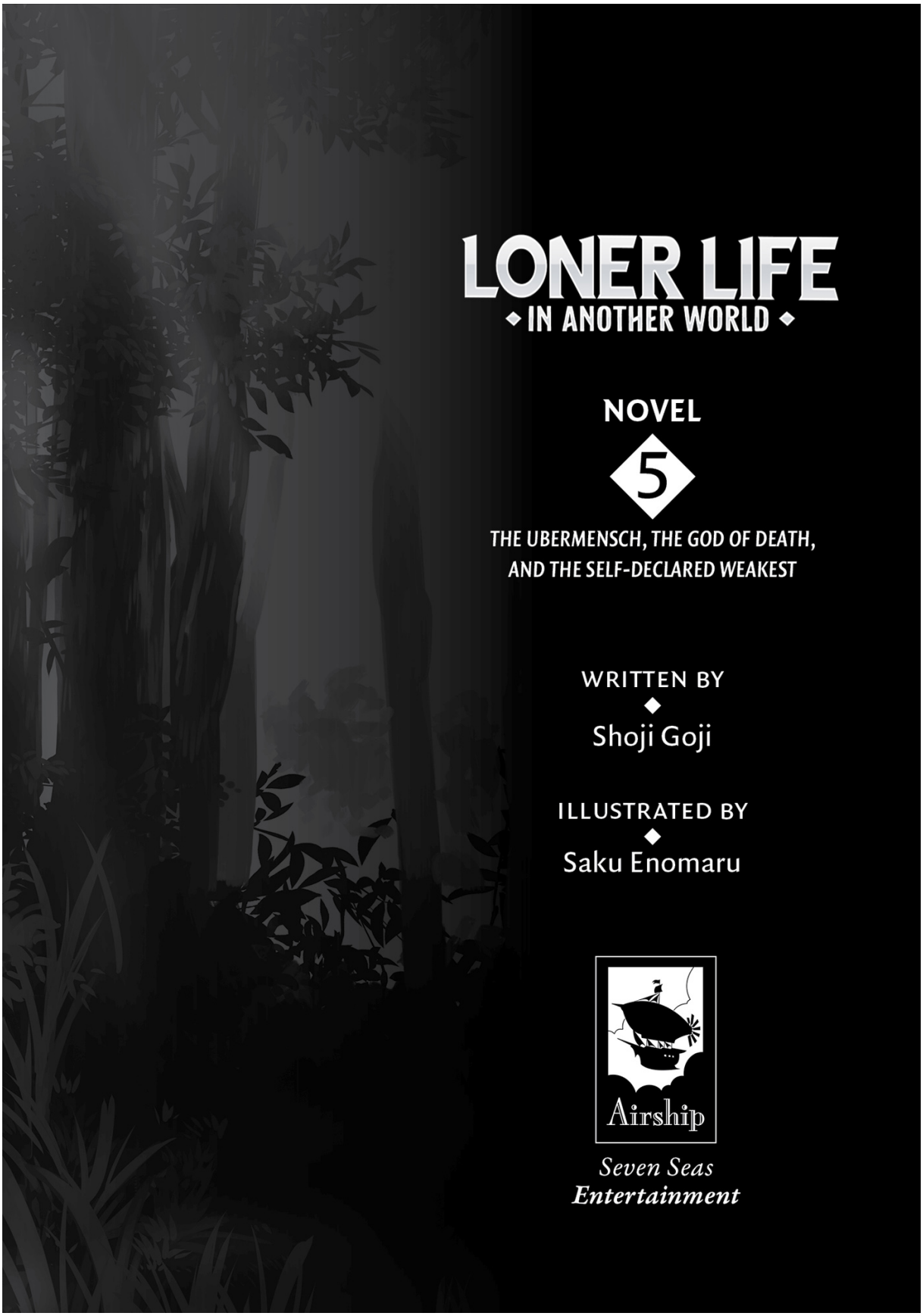


LONER LIFE
IN ANOTHER WORLD

NOVEL

5

THE UBERMENSCH, THE GOD OF DEATH, AND THE SELF-DECLARED WEAKEST

WRITTEN BY

Shoji Goji

ILLUSTRATED BY

Saku Enomaru

Airship

Seven Seas
Entertainment

CHARACTERS

QUEEN BEE

One of Haruka's classmates. Leader of a group of five fashion-obsessed girls. A former model.

BOOK CLUB PRESIDENT

One of Haruka's classmates. A level-headed strategist who was involved with literary activities back in school. Has known Haruka since elementary.

SHIELD GIRL

One of Haruka's classmates. A serious girl who protects everyone with her massive shield. Tends to get knocked around a lot from taking so many hits.

NUDIST GIRL

One of Haruka's classmates. A former candidate for Japan's Olympic swim team. Close with Fish Girl as a former swim team member.

FISH GIRL

One of Haruka's classmates. After getting chased around by guys in the fantasy world, deeply distrusts men...besides Haruka.

GYMNASTICS GIRL

One of Haruka's classmates. A former candidate for Japan's Olympic gymnastics team. An alchemist who transforms gymnastics equipment into weapons.

NERD C

One of Haruka's classmates. The Guardian of the group of four nerds. Excels at protective skills.

SLIME EMPEROR

A former dungeon boss. Absorbs enemy skills with Predation. Haruka used "Servitude" on it.

STALKER GIRL

The daughter of the chief of the Shino clan, a family specializing in reconnaissance. A top-class spy with Perfect Invisibility.

SHALLICERES

The princess of the Kingdom of Diorelle. Traumatized by experiencing the half-naked heave-ho of the pseudo-dungeon. Also known as the Royal Girl and Shillyshally.

MEROPAPA

The Duke of Omui. An invincible warrior hero known as the Frontier King and War God, among other titles.

MERIELLE

The daughter of the Duke of Omui. Unable to remember her name, Haruka calls her Merimeri, and now so does everyone else.

CLASS REP

The student council president of Haruka's class. Talented leader. Has known Haruka since elementary school.

HARUKA

A high school student summoned to another world. The only member of his class not to receive a cheat skill from God.

ANGELICA

The former emperor of the Ultimate Dungeon. Haruka used "Servitude" on her. Also known as Miss Armor Rep.

VICE REP A

One of Haruka's classmates. A cool beauty prone to glaring at the guys when they do something stupid.

VICE REP B

One of Haruka's classmates. An absentminded girl who was voted most popular student in the class. An Archsage.

VICE REP C

One of Haruka's classmates. A lively ankle-biter who longs to grow up into an adult. She's like a class mascot.

STORY

Haruka, a loner, was summoned to a fantasy world along with the rest of his class. After he enslaved the dungeon emperor Angelica, she joined him in exploring the various dungeons of the region. He spent his days improving their home base, Omui, with treasures acquired from the dungeons.

Then, the corrupt Lord of Nallogi sent the Stalker Girl to spy on Haruka. But rather than seeing her as an enemy, Haruka treated her with kindness. His only goal was to bring happiness to as many people as he could—and, inspired by his words, the Stalker Girl betrayed Nallogi. Enraged, Lord Nallogi was about to execute the Stalker Girl when Haruka appeared at the last second, using teleportation magic to rescue her. To protect Omui from both Nallogi and the rest of the kingdom, Haruka converted the only road between Nallogi and Omui into a pseudo-dungeon.

PROLOGUE

◆

WATCHING, SEEING was enough to recognize this was another dimension. He was the only person in the world who could oppose Miss Armor Rep in a sword duel—a dimension so far beyond me that I couldn't tell who had the upper hand.

I was watching, so I knew I was being watched in turn. My skills were completely sealed, all my options erased in one blow. Without the space to come up with a strategy, my hands were tied. I couldn't move—I'd die if I attacked head on—and it felt like he had managed to trample off my possible destinations.

His skills were primed for murder. The very structure of his body gave him an irresistible technique, presented him with infinite clean-kill options in the mirror of his clairvoyance. I couldn't win. There was no way to win, not as a human, not against this old dude.

I'm totally screwed. If I kept thinking, he'd catch up, and if I stopped thinking, I'd instantly die. He could see a way to kill me for certain. He was just waiting for the opening to appear.

Let's get out of here, I thought. *If I bounce, his attacks can't reach me.* I couldn't beat him, so then I just needed to leave, am I right?

He had Royal Girl and Maid Girl in his range, and this old man certainly intended to capture, not kill. Thinking wouldn't help me outwit him; he was always one step ahead.

Jiggle jiggle?

Well, he might not anticipate Slimey. Slimey was his own kind of one-on-one combat expert. I just hoped that Royal Girl would follow my lead. Because I couldn't respond. They needed to get here for all of this to work.

And that's how things started to move. I thought I had my own sexy stalker, but nope, they were one step ahead of me all along. Maybe if Royal

Girl could give me a little glimpse up her sexy dress—*no, no, I w-would never, ahhh!* Well, that was my best shot to get a look, and while I screwed that one up, I couldn't help but be impressed by the old dude who didn't even bother to glance at the peachy butt right before his eyes. *Talk about terrifying!*

I had to advance. There was nothing left to do. The old dude had the perfect tools for killing: endless control over his body, a perfect read on my psychology, and an endless understanding of the circumstances of battle.

"Uh, I don't know if you're a thief or a murderer or some sort of pervert, but do you need something, old feller? Because I certainly don't need anything from an old dude like yourself, and speaking of which, why couldn't you be *anything* but an old dude?!"

I couldn't see him draw his sword. By the time I saw it, it was far too late. Oh me, oh my, oh mighty, he should've looked first. Because I finished looking.

All I needed to do was swing. No thoughts, just the swinging of a blade…subconsciously, of course. He perfectly penetrated all reason and breathing and motion. But he should've looked. Because he could've seen it coming? Because I seriously gave up on all that? *Hi-ya?*

DAY 55

NIGHT

Eating before bed makes you fat, but he'll be fine because he was a blob to start with.

THE WHITE LOSER INN

THE TRAITOROUS Book Club President beamed. She loved her new bag.

"We can get the information we need at any time from Stalker Girl's clan," she said. "At the moment, they're focusing on gathering information about the forces of the kingdom and the nobility. At present, there is no basis to declare that war has been averted."

"Tsk!"

She carefully examined the interior of the cherished bag.

"Sometimes wars break out for senseless, illogical reasons," she continued. "You need look no further than our own history, where, since time immemorial, feudal civilizations collapsed due to the idiocy of the aristocrats. Those fools involved themselves in pointless wars, suffered defeats, and destroyed their own kingdoms."

Don't tell me she wants another bag?!

"Idiots like that always act without considering the consequences—they'll find some pretext to invade. The more reasons they have to avoid war, the more they want to fight. That sort of idiocy is infectious, and they'll end up dooming everyone. Thinking you will always be able to protect the girls is pure naivety. That's why I'm training them for war. It is a necessary precaution."

The Book Club President had originally dropped by just to pick up her bag. Did she really expect me to say, "Enjoy it!" after her betrayal?

After I made my complaints known, she started lecturing me. The worst part was, she was right. Mr. Meridad would have to face the capital

by himself. He couldn't just ignore their threats. *And now she's grabbing a third bag!*

"The girls were training on their own before I even got involved," she said. "Certainly, I emphasized collaborative war-time strategy, but they were already practicing hand-to-hand combat and defensive tactics. No matter how much you try to shelter and spoil us, we all want to fight. They're training to protect *you*, Haruka-kun. They know that they're still weak, so they naturally wish to become strong. We all share the same goal, and the more you try to protect us, the more we will try to protect you."

I'm losing count, she must have four or five bags now!

"It's true that until now we've put on a brave front, but you underestimate the girls, Haruka-kun. Even if we cry, we don't lack resolve. Angelica is pitching in to train us too. Even with eyes full of tears, we're training and becoming more powerful. And all of this is for you."

She took the best bags I had and left. So soon after her treachery, she really absconded with all ten of the bags I made!

Her argument was flawless. So what I saw yesterday and today wasn't their first practice. They had been training in combat against human opponents for a while now because they wanted to protect me. They trained not just to fight monsters in dungeons, but also to fight people in war. Even though they struggled against monsters, they continued to pursue both goals.

Maybe I had underestimated the girls a little, but it was very naughty of Miss Armor Rep to go behind my back and trounce the other ladies like that! *Aaaah!* I would dole out her wicked punishment tonight—something to look forward to.

Even now, the girls were training in the back garden, combining it with punishment for the meatheads and nerds, doing a boys versus girls sparring match feat. Miss Armor Rep. Speaking from copious personal experience, trying to escape from Miss Armor Rep only made the consequences worse.

Even if I did underestimate them, they were still being way too innocent about this. Despite the effectiveness of the training, they still had critical weaknesses. They definitely had a massive advantage when it came

to military tactics and formations, but that made them especially vulnerable to unusual enemies and situations.

"Slimey, can you join in? I'll reward you with ten sweets before bedtime. They say eating before bed will make you fat, but you're already a little blob, so there's no harm, y'know?"

Jiggle jiggle.

Sounded like a deal. With the addition of Master Slime, the girls were going to get a crash course in fighting against a unique and infinitely adaptable opponent.

"I still don't get why they're trying to get stronger despite their tears… A normal person can't just bounce back after all that's happened these past two months. They're pushing themselves too hard."

Wiggle wiggle.

People have limits. If we over-exert ourselves, we break, I thought. *At some point, trying your best becomes doing too much.* I had a civil war to prevent. Maybe I could weaken their resolve with another bargain sale. I had a new line of soft knitwear coming out: every kind of cardigan, long and short socks, and the signature product, fur accessories! *They'll be too busy shopping to train tomorrow night! Their determination can't stand against this!*

A while later, I went over to invite Slimey to the bath, and while I was there, I checked out how the girls' training was going. The nerds and meatheads were already toast. *The perfect chance to walk all over them!*

"Hold out! Vanguard, shift to defense!" called the Class Rep.

"On it!"

They had to deal with consecutive thunderbolt attacks from Slimey's Incarnate skill.

"Everyone, scatter!"

"The rearguard has pulled back!"

"Surround him!"

The rearguard defended the group perfectly, allowing everyone else to focus on attacking. Their defensive effort was a success. Slimey wasn't on the level of a dungeon boss right now—he was a transforming phantasm, a freely shifting ghost!

"Here's a decoy! Illusion!"

"On to stage two. Illusion maneuver!"

Disturbance tactics against Slimey were pretty risky, but they knew that disturbance alone wouldn't be enough to win. It was a ploy to buy them time. They were just trying to escape from Slimey's never-ending rain of blows.

"Fire!"

"Ja!"

Why was she responding in German? They returned to formation as they peppered Slimey with magic bolts. Even if they couldn't win, they protected each other and worked together to survive. It was something Miss Armor Rep and I couldn't do. Their strategy prevented lasting harm.

"Healers, now!"

"Ja!"

Impressive. This was their true strength. Vice Rep B's healing spells were instantaneous. Meanwhile, the rearguard had enough options to defend against Slimey's attacks.

"Firewall!!"

"Get a load of my Arc Inferno!"

"Fire Bolts!"

"Go, Fire Arrow!"

"Inferno! Inferno!!"

"Fire Blast!"

They deserved a reward—a ton of sweets for Slimey, and a bargain sale for the girls. Miss Armor Rep looked on and nodded in approval. Even the dungeon emperor thought they made the grade!

"Huh, seems like I really underestimated them?"

Even if the girls couldn't win, this was proof that they could stay safe from Slimey's attacks. I should've expected as much, given they all had cheat skills. Nonetheless…they all underestimated the little blob on the other side, too.

"C'mon, Slimey, put in a bit of effort at the end, y'know? If you do, I'll give you five extra sweets and a super luxurious bath, okay?"

Bounce bounce!

Slimey wobbled across the battlefield and rained down a torrent of adorable, jiggly counterattacks. *So cute!*

"Waaaahh!"

"Agh!"

"Eep! Eek!"

"Mmmmff!"

The girls collapsed in an exhausted heap. Made sense! When Slimey went all out, only Miss Armor Rep stood a chance. If the girls were really able to hold off Slimey at full strength, every dungeon till now would've been a cakewalk.

"Uh, just so you guys know, Slimey is even more powerful than the Sphinx and the Sand Giant, so you never could've won. Literally impossible, y'know? He's so cute, isn't he?"

Jiggle jiggle!

The girls were out cold. I felt a little bad for them, but they could bring it up with the Book Club President if they didn't like it. She underestimated what Slimey was capable of. You girls should be worrying about the Xs over your eyes, not about me. *Oh well, time to take a bath.*

"Haruka-kun, you should spar with us for the next round!"

"Yeah, let's go!"

They already got back up? I knocked them back down in the blink of an eye. Now, time to take a bath for real.

Since most of the girls were completely passed out, I shuffled them inside with Magic Hands. *So, they thought they were tough enough to protect me?* They lost the match, even if only because of some underhanded

trickery and deceit. Even so, I still planned on rewarding them for their efforts tomorrow with a sale on a new frilly underwear line I'd developed. This time I didn't need measurements—the size could be adjusted by tying the laces!

"The laces might make things worse, but taking measurements is just completely unworkable for a teenaged sugar baby like me."

Jiggle jiggle.

Please, girls, learn to tailor your own clothes!

"I mean, a teenage boy taking measurements of his female classmates—of course it's unreasonable! It ain't easy being a teenage boy… Making bras is out of the question, right?"

Jiggle jiggle.

Even Slimey jiggled in sympathy, so it was fair to say that teenage boys needed to catch a break. Back to the girls: they all deserved a reward for working so hard. Like some thong underwear for the Book Club President!

DAY 55

NIGHT

Yikes! The object of their hatred was the beloved, ultrapopular, instantly sold-out thong underwear.

INTERLUDE: THE WHITE LOSER INN

WE GOT WIPED OUT. When we finally came to, we took off our equipment and unwound in the bath.

"I thought we were actually keeping up with Slimey for a minute there."

"Slimey is, like, *so* powerful."

Angelica defeated us, then Slimey, and finally Haruka-kun, too. We were hopeless.

"What are we supposed to do against their speed? He moved way too fast!"

There was still a huge gap between us. We could see his movements but couldn't react. It was like we were living in a slow-motion, frame-by-frame playback. That was Life or Death in action.

"It felt like fighting underwater! Really strange, right?"

"Totally. By the time we were ready to attack, he'd already won."

"Exactly!"

All twenty of us, powerless, knocked out simultaneously. That was the power of Haruka-kun's overclocked attacks.

"It's not just that he doesn't waste any movement… Dexterity alone can't explain that!"

"Yeah, it was like time itself didn't behave normally around him."

"Yeah!"

We were too slow to keep up. The match was already over in the blink of an eye. I was the fastest out of all of us, and even I wasn't fast enough. I saw what was coming, but he still knocked me out before I knew what was happening. That was the result of his kill-or-be-killed attitude. Even the tiniest gap—the most minuscule delay—would result in his death. So, he fought without any openings…by pouring his consciousness into those openings and wiping the floor with us without even a single landed counterattack. Was this how it felt to look death in the eye?

"You definitely can't call him weak!"

"Yeah, his stats are bull!"

Those stats *were* so hopelessly low that it wouldn't have surprised me if he did drop dead without warning. That's why he always killed his foes before they could act. That was the basis of his techniques. The rest was a sham.

We tended to hold back when fighting him because we were aware of the difference in stats, but that reluctance always cost us. We lost before we could even fight. The way he acted like an irritated slacker always lulled us into complacency, and before we knew it, we were on the floor. So, during the bath, we reflected on the battle.

"Well, I think we've gotten stronger. At least a little?"

Jiggle jiggle.

Slimey consoled us. Even though he had just taken a bath with Haruka-kun, he joined us as well. *He must like the water.* He always joined Poster Girl and Stalker Girl in the bath, too. Even now, he wobbled joyfully in the hot water…*Why are there* three *wiggling orbs?*

The Archsage said, "Mmm, Slimey was totally awesome. He can even use, um, weapons and whatever."

Jiggle jiggle!

She was the one who brought Slimey to the bath this time. *That pair of jiggly, round objects isn't your friend! In fact, it's the enemy of the other girls!*

"He doesn't telegraph his attacks at all. He's too unpredictable."

Wiggle wiggle!

The girls who fought him for the first time were surprised, and those of us who had battled against him before, in the dungeon, were just as floored. *He's too powerful!*

"At first, I wasn't sure if Haruka-kun was responsible for Slimey becoming Emperor-class. But everything is his fault, right? I should've known."

Jiggle jiggle.

At least Haruka-kun and Angelica now had a defensive option. Before, they could only rely on attacks. They truly demonstrated how the best defense could be an overpowering offense. Nonetheless, they always ran the risk of dying in one hit.

I'm not sure if it was because Haruka-kun had decided to recognize our strength, or if it was Slimey's influence, but he said that we could go to the 50th floor now. We could accompany Haruka-kun to that floor; we could fight the dungeon boss. And yet, we stayed straggling far behind those two in terms of combat ability, so far that we couldn't even see them on the horizon.

"He doesn't have the level or the skills. He just knows how to win."

He stole victory for himself—a patchwork, jury-rigged invulnerability. That was how he defeated us, even though he was the weakest of us all.

"Ugh, I can't stand it! We lost instantly!"

We couldn't touch him. Most of us had started to feel more confident lately, but now that confidence lay in tatters.

"What was it he said? Something about being so weak that he has to make his opponent weaker to compensate?"

"I don't know, but he certainly seemed pleased with himself when he wiped the floor with us!"

He attacked with the unstoppable powers of God's Sword and Dimension Blade and used Teleport to evade our attacks. On top of that, he used abilities like Infinite Magic Hands, Holding, and a whole freaking Pandora's Box of aces up his sleeve. He was only level 21, but he had acquired unfathomable power—not to mention his allies, Angelica and

Slimey. In other words, despite his apparent fragility, he could never be killed. You only needed to hit him to win—but he'd kill you before you ever came close.

"We have to protect him, though," the girls shouted. "I can't bear it!"

"Seriously!"

We agonized whenever we had to helplessly wait for him. Day after day, he faced certain death. I didn't want to live like that anymore. This world, the real world—none of that mattered. We would never stop grieving, never forget our families, but we understood that we had to move on.

I couldn't stand the thought of losing him. That would be more painful than anything else. That would break all of us. On that day, we would be beyond tears.

Shimazaki-san was particularly distressed. When Haruka-kun faced the Sand Giant, even though Slimey and Angelica protected him, she felt frustrated and useless. She got the benefits of Servitude first, and yet she had still fallen behind. *We all know how you feel,* I thought.

Haruka-kun came back as if everything was ordinary, but I heard that he collapsed after the fight, his nose bleeding profusely. Nonetheless, he pretended everything was fine and dandy, and smiled while he cooked hamburgers for us. That's why I wanted to become strong enough to protect him.

After finishing our bath, we encountered our reward. The Poster Girl delivered it, at Haruka-kun's request. After we tore open the wrapping paper, we discovered something he swore he would never make—frilly underwear and thongs. According to the Poster Girl, no additional orders were allowed.

"Oh my god, underwear?!"

"I can't believe it!"

"They're adorable!"

They were definitely cute, and we had a severe shortage of undergarments, so I appreciated the gesture. I'd do him the favor of not asking why he was so familiar with underwear designs. Still…this world

didn’t have bras. We tried to make them ourselves, but we could never get the shape right. We wanted to ask him to make some, but there was the serious problem of measurements. And Book Club President was the only one who got thongs? This must have been his way of making it up to her, but…*she’s putting them on!*

A classic Japanese beauty in pink thong underwear… *Now that’s dangerous.* Her personality was so serious, and yet… *I’m guessing Haruka-kun won’t let us put in additional orders for these?*

DAY 55

NIGHT

I'd love to request that she take off the magnificent bandeau bra and athletic shorts combo.

THE WHITE LOSER INN

THE CONTENTS OF THE BOOK were descriptive and suggested a wide range of applications. I thought through the possibilities with meticulous attention to detail, not leaving a single metaphorical stone unturned.

"A magic mold? Altering the elasticity of materials?"

Let's Go Magic Items! was, aside from the name, a priceless work of genius! Just a skim through revealed all sorts of useful info. It was a well-researched academic manual that would allow me to lead a more fulfilling life. *I can pull this off if I balance out the shape!*

"Gotta say, this might have a disastrous effect on my sex appeal. I already made panties, though, so it can't get much worse than that. And is the Thong Girl gonna thank me or what? Imagine if she actually put 'em on, proving that she was secretly a babe this whole time!"

This page here seemed to describe an advanced version of the prismatic technique! The alchemy was complicated, as were the necessary skills, but the materials and manufacturing stayed the same. It needed higher level spellstones, but that probably depended on the alchemical techniques used more than anything else.

"Hmmm. Elasticity alone won't be enough. I really need to figure out a way to do draping. Yeah, draping, even until it starts to chafe—huh?"

The girls were obviously unhappy that this world didn't have proper underwear. I made it a priority order at the general store, but apparently the local tailors had a lot of trouble making it. They had no trouble following patterns to make simple garments, but they didn't have any skill when it came to creating something that should fit comfortably. The townsfolk were only just getting access to modern clothing. I also had some early success

manufacturing fabrics coated in spellstone powder, which, while expensive, were worth the price.

"Thanks to the flow of magic, clothes made with spellstone powder are more durable and dirt-resistant, have higher defense values, and resist status ailments, so it's worth the investment even if we disregard the prismatic effect."

I still hadn't heard back from the girls. Slimey was doing his bath rounds. Let's see… Since costs were so high, I could bring prices down by deploying an assembly line. Even if the effects were weaker, cheap spellstones were easier to grind down into a powder. Bras were my biggest remaining problem.

"A teenage boy making patterns for bras alone at night…and after sacrificing my charisma to avoid taking measurements…"

The early requests for underwear had transformed into a signed and written petition. Speaking of which, who installed a suggestion box right outside of my room? Was it stuffed with noise complaints about my nocturnal adventures?

"Notes like *bleached cotton is so hot and itchy, I can barely stand to wear it* practically force me to imagine certain parts of the body! Are they trying to get me in trouble?!"

They want breathability, eh? I could use a magical mold to make all their clothes, adjusting it to fit. I suspected that I would end up getting more custom orders, but I couldn't think about that now. And there was one person whose custom size I should avoid thinking about at all costs!

"Slimey even demonstrated what it was like to bathe with her…using Mimesis… Don't think about it! No one should know what Slimey mimicked!"

I definitely didn't offer to massage any part of Slimey's new form, so stop asking! I was going to use high-tier spellstones for my classmates' outfits, so those would be bespoke affairs either way. If I made a full set of undergarments for Miss Armor Rep, they'd force me to make the same for the rest of them, too.

"With bras it's tough because the size needs to be just right, like, if it's not right then it hurts, and I got no experience making them… Can you

imagine if I had bra-making chops? Thinking about how it'd affect my sex appeal makes me wanna cry!"

I didn't have the resources to mass produce high-tier spellstone crafts since I couldn't maintain powerful effects without using Supreme Thinking. Currently, the assembly line failed when it required too much precision. My Magic Hands would've been able to make bras perfectly if I had the measurements, but seeing how I could feel anything my tentacles touched… Yeah.

"Just knowing the approximate sizes is distressing enough for a teenage boy. If I measured them properly—as in, felt them, squeezed them, even…I would never be able to look the girls in the eyes again! I'd die! I would bleed out from my nose!"

In the end, Miss Armor Rep would end up dealing with the consequences of my…experience.

"I need a compromise," I said. "Maybe sports bras?"

Using the magic crafting techniques described in *Let's Go Magic Items!* I could pull that off. There was no point agonizing over the possibilities…so I would have to prototype something on Miss Armor Rep when she got back. And she'd need some athletic shorts to go with the bra! Of course, after she tried them on, I would have another *hard* problem to deal with; I'd make sure that she took it all off right away. *That's how it went every time so far!* A crisis was inevitable.

"I need to imagine the fit in order to make it, but if I imagine the fit then I'm already screwed!"

I excitedly made athletic shorts and boxers. *Alas, sweet sex appeal. Goodbye.*

"I'll make some for me too… Boxers, that is!"

Boxers, not a bra! I was on team boxers, not that it was anyone's business. To test the garment, I pasted together the layers of fabric temporarily. Straps were proving tricky, but I really liked that racerback look.

"If I make it a strapless tube bra, problem solved!"

I wondered what was best, since I'd never worn one myself, and I probably wouldn't learn anything even if I tried. *Not that I ever would! Especially not now!*

"Calm down, calm down. No, I'm not going to be a teenage boy who makes a bandeau bra in the dead of night and then tries it on himself! No, don't do it!"

My sex appeal, not to mention the sanctity of this entire town, couldn't handle something like that! It was for *Miss Armor Rep* to wear, not me! *It's for her and that's that! For her to take off, that is!*

"I'm into spandex tights, too! Yeah!"

I sounded like a pervert listing his fetishes out loud. What was happening to me?

"The nerds will definitely say they only care about stripes and nothing else, but they'll never see any of this, so they don't get a vote. Besides, I don't want to make anything for guys, that's boring… Anyway, I'm definitely not enjoying this, and I'm not just being tsundere either!"

I looked forward to seeing Miss Armor Rep try them on; that would be fun. *What would the next upgrade of Revival be called?* I wondered.

"If she doesn't come back soon, I won't be able to finish, but if she does come back, then I might still not finish because of an all-night work stoppage!"

All my progress on this project would be interrupted by events progressing in a different way, and we'd end up making so much progress there that there would be no room for any other kind of progress.

"Hmm, this bra has a 10% Vitality boost and Impact Resistance (small). What kind of bra needs to resist impacts? I'll put that on the other clothes."

The mithril equipment was also coming along nicely, and soon everyone would have optimal armor. If even their bras came with enchantments, that should pad their stats out quite a bit. But that was the only padding allowed! *Any other kind ruins all the illusions of teenage boys!*

The equipment was fine in itself, but there was always more I could do. Getting proper equipment for a group of twenty-nine cheat-skill wielders took quite a bit of effort. And with the help of Teleport, their sheer numbers presented a massive advantage in combat. With the full group, and at their skill level, they shouldn't have any problems with a 50th floor dungeon boss. They shouldn't…so long as the dungeon boss wasn't an outlier. Which shouldn't be the case. Which meant it still could be the case.

The problem was that a some of them were starting to get stuck at level 99. They might need to cross some additional hurdle to make it to level 100, and there could be some greater threat we didn't know about above that level.

"They don't even need to be fighting right now," I mumbled.

They worked so hard to become more powerful, even though they didn't need to, so the least I could do was help improve their base stats. *While trying not to think too hard about their natural endowments! Good luck, me.*

"More orders? Ugh. But I need the money."

Lately, the general store lady had started ordering from people besides myself. This didn't mean I could relax, but local farms and workshops were starting to supply basic daily necessities. The old dude at the weapon shop had apparently gotten some apprentices, too, and iron production was ramping up. Since we had a trade embargo with the outside, however, total sales were down. I could counter that with smuggling, but I didn't think it was wise to let the kingdom get their hands on more weapons.

"Since I have a little bit of free time, I could make weapons, but that would definitely trigger another event flag and I'd be drowning in work in no time."

Why was it that the only event flags I ever tripped always ended with me doing more work?

Naturally, the general store lady marked all her orders urgent, including mushroom fried rice.

"Make it yourself! It's only for three damn people! I'm tired of making a hundred portions and watching them vanish instantly! Although I

guess it wouldn't hurt to throw some fried rice together. Do I have enough eggs, though?"

I felt a presence and heard sprightly footsteps before a knock came at the door.

"I'm b-back!" She sounded happy.

Miss Armor Rep was indeed back, though she still stuttered when she spoke. *All right, let's get started.* Maybe I should talk to her first? Since she did have a big, bright smile on her face. I'm sure she wanted to chat about the bundle of clothes under her arms. I was just glad she had a good day. I'd be happy to hear everything. I wanted to know all about the happy moments of her pleasant day.

She couldn't have done any of these things before. *Especially this thing!* It was all prepared: six full sets of undergarments! How about we go for six rounds?

DAY 56

MORNING

They don't notice even when surrounded, so just rush in from behind with ranged attacks and go for the kill!

THE WHITE LOSER INN

TODAY WE WERE GOING to take on the 50th floor as a group. Tomorrow was a day off, so we wanted to make sure we wrapped everything up. Today, I would participate as an observer, a secret-room detector, and an emergency backup.

"This dungeon has a lot of flying monsters, so keep your eyes peeled."

"Mostly bird-types, right?"

"Most of them were weak to either physical or magic attacks," Class Rep said, "so don't just rush in—figure out their weaknesses first."

"Got it!"

The mean girls had taken care of this dungeon up to the 49th floor with mainly swords, which should have made them especially vulnerable to flying monsters, so how exactly did they get this far—by biting?

"With thirty-two people here, I won't have a chance to fight, but it's not like I had a chance with only three people either, so why does it feel like I'm always getting busier despite having nothing to do?"

Miss Armor Rep and Slimey nodded and wiggled, respectively. Miss Armor Rep had devolved to the same linguistic level as Slimey. She was pretty vocal during her morning lecture. But all this talk about smashing the canaries inhabiting this proverbial coal mine was going to piss off the animal rights groups.

"They're coming, watch out!"

"They're so cute but they're not friendly at all!"

“Do they think they deserve to be called cute by high school girls? Not a chance!”

“That’s right, get ’em!”

“Fight seriously, you guys!”

The birds did look pretty cute. They were round and fluffy, like baby chicks. I almost would have wanted one as a pet, if not for their skill, Deadly Poison. If one of them so much as pecked me, I’d die and my last words would be, “Sooo cute!” It was a trap! I had to stop myself from reaching out to pet them!

“We’re surrounded!”

“Circular formation, rearguard up!”

“There are so many!”

“They’re slipping through our defenses!”

They had Pack Tactics, too; a tough lot to deal with. They dodged attacks, fled into the shadows, and attacked the girls from behind with beaks dripping poison. That part wasn’t particularly cute. They were still adorable, though.

Even so, I’d rather get pecked to death by these li’l guys than get chomped by the mean girls. This whole “accidentally enthralled teenage girls” problem was a fatal blow to my sex appeal in this world, but I didn’t have a Set Free skill I could use to undo it! I couldn’t say that out loud, because they’d bite me…*but they’re glaring at me anyway!*

“Scatter them!”

“Halt their movements!”

“But don’t get reckless!”

The mean girls advanced ahead of the main formation and started casting medium-range spells to charge their blades, especially Whirlwind Slash. The Wind magic hindered the birds’ flight and the mean girls cut them down. It wasn’t an especially creative technique, but it got the job done. Even though all five of them were level 99, they made sure not to advance too far ahead of the rearguard.

Meanwhile, the meatheads were off somewhere chasing after the birds. They were jumping all over the place, clambering up walls, and trying to grab the birds hovering near the ceiling. How stupid were they?

"Are you guys a bunch of brainless mobs? Were you listening when we said this floor is full of flying enemies? You're doing the exact same thing you did with the moths! You have Lightning magic. Stop chasing them! Are you dogs? Is this just your instinct? Maybe I'll throw you some bones to fetch next time!"

Wiggle wiggle.

And then there was the Archsage, who'd demonstrated her mastery of large-scale destruction magic during training, but preferred to whack monsters with her staff right now. It didn't look like a staff so much as a giant hammer that she swung around ceaselessly. And that wasn't the only thing swinging. *Ahem!*

Class Rep glared at me. For this battle, she had switched to a sword-and-board style. She had an all-rounder build, so I wouldn't be surprised to see her whip out a longsword next. *Is she wearing the equally versatile frilly panties? Uh, never mind, just turn around and fight! You'll get stabbed if you keep glaring at me, y'know?*

As cute as these level 23 golden spear canaries were, they still went extinct. It was a massacre; the girls from the Arts clubs tormented the cute little birdies with powerful illusions and disquieting hexes. If you failed to resist, you were doomed—just like seeing the Book Club President in a thong! *Is she wearing it now? For real?!*

I appreciated the brisk pace we were setting, although it was almost too fast for me to get my bearings. At least we were moving in the right direction. The weak were getting even stronger than me. They kept leveling up, on and on down the same well-trodden path. This approach to dungeons was foolproof. The only problem was the level wall at level 100. If the condition was to defeat a dungeon boss, they should've cleared that back in the Ultimate Dungeon. Was one not enough? Or did it not count because they did it all together?

"I'm gonna swing by the secret chamber, okay? Just while y'all are picking up the spellstones. I'm not slacking off, I promise. Trust me, y'know? As soon as I said that, you all looked like you wouldn't trust me

any further than you could throw me, what's up with that? Treasure chests await, though! Onward and downward, y'know?"

Spellstones lay all over the place after the battle, so retrieving them was bound to be annoying. Still, it shouldn't take too long with twenty-nine people. That was why I decided to check out the secret room. *I'm not slacking off, I'm just being efficient!* Why did they believe me less and less the more I explained?

"He ran away," Vice Rep B said.

"Fine with me. Goodbye, Haruka-kun!" said the Book Club President.

In the secret chamber, I found a level 23 big canary—or would have, if Slimey hadn't gotten to it first. Wonder what it tasted like? At least Slimey spared the treasure chest.

Boing boing!

"I'm back, y'know? I found a Floating Stone. It floats. Well, I did my best to lighten the mood here with it, but it's useless. Should I toss it to the nerds? They're experts on being useless, ya dig?"

"What made you decide it was useless?!"

Slimey stared intently at the Floating Stone.

"You want it?"

Jiggle jiggle!

Would it make Slimey float? Was he going to advance from ground jiggling to air jiggling? He always floated in the girls' bath, apparently, so that was a start. But what were the other two things floating in that scene? Were there other slime customers at the inn?!

Wiggle wiggle.

The girls let me keep the Floating Stone on the condition that I prepare mystery bird stew for lunch. I gave it to Slimey. Apparently, he had an interest in stones, so I gave him an ingot of mithril too, which he promptly swallowed. The little gourmand didn't go for ordinary rocks, though—he was too classy for the cheap stuff.

"Mystery bird stew! Delicious hot pot!" the girls shouted.

"I can't wait!"

Jiggle wiggle!

Was it really okay for us to eat stew in the dungeon? I supposed that if a former dungeon emperor and former dungeon boss didn't mind, it was fine. This was my first time making a bird-meat hot pot.

The cute little canaries were the only monsters that respawned. Slimey joined the vanguard party out of boredom, since no monsters made it past them anyway. *If you sit on the Queen Bee's head like that, you'll get bit, Slimey! Don't you realize that? They're just like kobolds!*

"How many times do we have to tell you we don't bite!" the mean girls shouted back.

Huh? Since when? I had a distinct memory of biting…*well, whatever.* I visited the secret room to collect more loot. *As soon as we finish, I'll be on vacation!*

"Huh? 'The Grand Wall: Vitality, Power +30%, Defense bonus,' and 'Gigantic Spear: Power +30%, +ATT'? We got this before, didn't we? One of you has 'em, right?"

"He's totally mastered the Ignore skill!"

Everyone had so much magical equipment, I couldn't remember who had what. I had too much loot to even keep track of my own equipment!

"Did you forget? I sold them because they were too heavy."

"Yeah, they were so big and cumbersome."

"I'm desperate for an enchanted bow or cloak, but those never seem to drop."

"I'm like, gagging for some enchanted boots and gloves, too."

"There aren't enough axes, either," Vice Rep C squeaked.

Jiggle jiggle.

Unpopular products, I thought. I decided to sell these to the armory and give everyone some spending money with the proceeds…which would inevitably end up back in my hands! For today's sale, I had anklets, sports bras, panties, and fur accessories. This was *definitely* going to make me rich.

“Hey, Haruka-kun, do you want to stop by the forge when we get back to town?” Nerd A asked.

“Yeah, we want to craft composite bows, and if you could enchant them, they’d be super useful.”

“We’d finally have a way to deal with those birds!”

Composite bows were made from different materials laminated together, making them more compact and useful in enclosed spaces. If I could find a way to mass produce them, it would put an end to our bow shortage.

“I didn’t expect you nerds to be so conniving on your first business venture! Making bows to rip the girls off even more? That’s genius! I love this plan! Let’s bankrupt them!”

“Knock it off! We want to sell them at fair prices! We don’t want to rip anyone off!”

“And now the girls are glaring at *us* for some reason!” whispered one of the nerds.

“Yeah, their burning gaze is making my scalp itch!”

“And we’re not conniving!” they shouted.

Bows would give the girls more ranged attack options before they closed in to melee range. Getting the first strike would also be a huge advantage, and they would reduce MP usage.

“If we can mass produce them, we can really scam the girls.”

“Stop talking about scams! And quit glaring at us like it’s *our* idea!” Nerd D lamented.

This was a brilliant idea. But I had no faith in the nerds actually crafting these bows. I was sure that they’d memorized the composite bow crafting *process*, but that meant nothing. Whatever they ended up making, it wouldn’t be a composite bow!

“Are you going to attach a steam engine to the bows? Please don’t tell me you’re planning on adding a dedicated flight mode!”

“What kind of composite bow is that?!”

“Remember when you said you’d make a sword and ended up with a steamboat?” I asked.

“Just because we accidentally turned a sword into a steamboat doesn’t mean we’ll make a bow into a plane!”

“Don’t give him more ammo,” one nerd said.

When they tried to make a table, it became a chair. Maybe they’d make a composite bow that you could sit on? *Yeah, and it’ll fire when you sit on it!* Hauling chairs around a dungeon sounded exhausting, but at least they’d have something to sit on when they needed to take a break.

“That’s it! If I make a bunch of coin-operated massage chairs and scatter them all over the place, I’ll rake in a small fortune!”

“I thought we were talking about composite bows?!”

“But I want a modest fortune! I’ll be a Massage Magnate in no time! My next hustle is decided!”

“He’s not even listening…”

All I had to do was add spellstones imbued with Vibration magic into some chairs and fine-tune them. The guild definitely needed one. And the duke’s palace!

“All those old geezers with stiff backs are always carrying heavy stacks of documents! They’d kill for a massage chair! I’ll be rich!”

“And why do you think they never get any rest?” the Class Rep said, glaring at me. “What force of chaos could keep them so busy?”

“Hello? We’re about to reach the 50th floor, you know.”

The 50th floor. It’d probably be an aerial battle judging by all the flying monsters we’d encountered in this dungeon. *Aerial? More like…aerial pain in the butt.*

“The meatheads are going to charge in no matter what, so I recommend launching ranged area-of-effect attacks while they distract the boss, y’know? They’re too stupid to work with the rest of us, but you can still use them in your plans.”

A dungeon boss meant we couldn’t let our guard down, but the girls had to face this to overcome the level wall. Even so, the meatheads never

overcame their idiocy, no matter how much their Intelligence stat went up.

"Screw you, bro! We can follow instructions. We'll notice if you start slamming us with AOE attacks!" shouted a meathead.

Huh? They could understand me? Interesting, so they were capable of speech…this was slightly more intelligence than I expected.

"Give us a break! Why you gotta roast us like that, bro?!"

"Hey!"

"Why are you dissing us?!"

"Leave us alone!"

Yet, they were still so stupid that they forgot about their boomerangs. The ones I made for them after they begged me for ages.

"Why do you think I toil all night? Just so you can forget the items I work so hard to make for you? Use the boomerangs for ranged attacks! Don't forget about them the moment you're done playing with them!"

"Whoa, I totally forgot about the boomerangs! Bro, are these things really weapons?"

So stupid. Too stupid! I couldn't stand it anymore. They actually thought that the boomerangs were frisbees. They had wanted to sling them around in the forest, that was all.

"And don't chase after them when you throw them! Are you dogs? You barely use your hands. Maybe you *are* dogs! You're stupider than kobolds!"

"We use our hands! Shut up, dude!"

Hopeless. Well, they were at the age where you try to look cool. I knew in their heart of hearts they were wondering where their hands were.

"Damn dude, that was close, I almost used my hands!"

"Haruka-kun was right?!"

Every time the boomerangs came back to them, they all shouted in surprise…only to throw them out and chase them again. Boomerangs were an ancient weapon that people had been using with no problem for

millennia, and yet these dumbasses couldn't grasp their basic function. Those were *genuine* shouts of surprise. Seriously?

DAY 56

NOON

Class Rep got a promotion to Mistress and became an animal trainer on top of it.

A DUNGEON

50TH FLOOR

THE GIANT BOOMERANG spun through the air, tracing an elliptical arc with a howl. It could deal devastating damage when it hit its target.

"Stay! Stay!" the Class Rep commanded.

The meatheads stopped! They halted on the spot. Maybe I ought to make leashes for these guys. Those were definitely necessary.

That sounded a bit like BDSM stuff—did Class Rep get promoted to the Mistress job? She was better at ordering guys around than a queen!

"Okay, we get it!"

"It's just, like, totally tempting to chase it, you know?"

"Why would *you* chase it?" Class Rep sighed at Vice Rep B. "That doesn't even make sense!"

"Being an animal trainer suits her!" the girls exclaimed.

The meatheads actually stopped running after the boomerang. Did that mean meatheads *could* learn new tricks?

"Maybe it'd be more efficient if we just threw *you* at the boss?" I suggested.

"Don't throw us!!"

"If you follow the boomerangs, it defeats the whole purpose of using a ranged attack!" Class Rep said. "You just end up in melee!"

"Whooaaaa," the meatheads said. "That kind of makes sense, boss."

They didn't realize that before?!

“How many times did I tell you to not go running in, and you did anyway?! We’re fighting a bird made of fire!”

“Yeah, it’s literally burning! Of course, it’ll hurt when you touch it!”

“Huh? Fire bad?”

The rearguard was busy defending us from the constant rain of fireballs from above, while the rest of us cast spells, loosed arrows, and threw boomerangs and meatheads at the phoenix from below. It had too many hit points.

“I’m kind of bored,” I grumbled.

Nod nod.

Jiggle jiggle.

Miss Armor Rep, Slimey, and I were forbidden from participating, so all I could do was mock the meatheads. Even that started to get boring after a while. Slimey couldn’t join in on the commentary because he didn’t have a mouth. Although, how was he so good at eating without a mouth?

“That bird looks super warm. Isn’t it worried about getting burnt?”

Wiggle wiggle?

“Avoid it when it’s straight overhead!”

“Roger!”

“Dang, this is boring!” I observed.

“We can’t maintain the barrier!”

“Breaking through the inferno barrage isn’t working! This thing is invincible!”

It kept evading the giant boomerang, and the class was so focused on surviving its attacks that they couldn’t land any solid hits on it. Every once in a while, the bird launched a rapid barrage of fireballs. The nerds managed to block them with Barrier, but didn’t have the time to do anything more than that. On top of that, the phoenix was surrounded by an impenetrable Flame Barrier.

“Haruka-kun, don’t you dare say anything! We’re fighting with everything we can, and who knows when we’ll get hungry!”

“Mm, fried chicken… No, get its head! Cut off the damn thing’s head!”

“Our arrows just keep burning up in the Flame Barrier!”

The Arts Club girls were all immune to status ailments, but their ranged attacks burned up before hitting the phoenix. They switched to using arrows, but the arrows turned to ash midair. This was a battle of endurance.

“Our magic is completely ineffective.”

“But when we hit it straight on, it stays in place. It’s using all of its energy just to defend itself from the arrows.”

Obviously, composite bows would be nice here, but enchanted arrows would help even more. The girls had good accuracy, but couldn’t deal enough damage. The phoenix had Revival, too.

“Man, this bird might just be a sex god,” I said.

“What the—?!”

Does it also regenerate from trying too hard all night long? It had level 8 Revival, though it didn’t have Super Horny or Alpha Male. *We are not the same.*

“I’m pretty sure we need to somehow knock it out of the air. A ranged battle of attrition just puts us at a disadvantage. Don’t you think so, Miss Armor Rep?”

Nod nod.

Jiggle jiggle.

This battle would end if I just threw Slimey at it. Even if it could regenerate, Slimey could still swallow it whole. Slimey looked like he’d been dying to eat the bird this whole time. But we were prohibited from interfering, and that included eating.

“Focus your fire at the base of its wings!” commanded Class Rep.

“Roger!”

It looked like they were trying to shoot it down, but it was too difficult to concentrate their attacks on an opponent that was constantly swooping through the air. And only Slimey and I could pull off something like the wire-cutter trap.

“If they try to use a net, it’ll just burn,” I commented.

Jiggle jiggle.

I was the only one who could use Airwalk to walk up walls, and only my Dimension Blade or Miss Armor Rep’s Sword Flash was fast enough to land a hit. In a battle of attrition, whoever had Revival had a huge advantage. And of the members of our class, only Slimey, Class Rep, and I had that skill.

I actually forgot that Class Rep was a lot like me, with the full set of Revival, Super Horny, and Alpha Male. She was staring daggers at me, so I decided to keep my mouth shut. *C’mon, just issue your orders, ’kay? Gotta focus on the battle! I wasn’t interfering. I swear.*

“I’m coming, guuuys!” Vice Rep B said. “Let’s try this out! Freeze Line, ungh!”

“Everyone, charge!” shouted Class Rep.

“On it!”

“Yeah!”

Vice Rep B created a series of crisscrossing ice bridges in the air, surrounding the phoenix and creating a path straight to it. This way, they didn’t have to shoot it out of the air—everyone could charge over the ice bridges and attack the phoenix. They had a chance.

“It’s a good idea in theory.”

“It takes…time. Too much.”

Wiggle wiggle.

Everyone could use magic, but there weren’t any specialist mages in the rearguard. A certain Archsage was trying to overcome that herself with large-scale magic, though. Incredibly large, round and trembling—*ahem, ahem!*

“It sounds like it should work, but they need to be much closer.”

Jiggle jiggle.

My classmates were short on offensive capabilities because the nerd Sage was focused on defense, but they definitely needed every ounce of that

they could get. Most of the dedicated spellcasters had been among the thirteen that died.

"Aim for the wings!"

"I'm going for the right!"

"I'm with you!"

"Same!"

"Leave the right to us!"

"We'll take the left!"

The nerds and the student council squad were aiming for the head. Would they make it in time? The ice bridges were already starting to melt from the phoenix's flames. Sliding on an ice bridge was probably a lot of fun, but the girls would yell at me if I started hooting and hollering while I slid down the ice. *They're already giving me dirty looks, so forget that!*

Jiggle jiggle?

"Yeah, this isn't gonna work."

The meatheads looked like they could take out the right wing, and now here they were, whacking the right wing with their boomerangs. They really were primitive.

"What did they think boomerangs were for when they demanded I make them? Maybe they were too stupid to know the difference between boomerangs and swords. Please say it ain't so!"

Boing boing!

Their attacks were effective, but with the left wing still raging and launching attacks, the battle was getting tense. The sports girls were holding off the legs with their shields, and the mean girls were aiming for the base of the left wing, but Vice Rep B's bridges were about to collapse.

"I'm raising the barrier!"

"Thanks, Oda-kun!"

"But we can't hold it for long!"

Rather than focusing on the wings, couldn't they end things faster by destroying the head?

“Revival’s gonna make this a real ordeal, isn’t it?”

“It’s also absorbing their magic. It is powerful.”

Wiggle wiggle?

Even though the ice bridges boxed the phoenix in place for now, the bird would just resume spamming Arc Inferno as soon as it was free. Level 50 didn’t sound too tough, but dungeon bosses were certainly on another level. I bet it had a secret technique as well. Indeed, it had a “?” skill when I appraised it.

“It’s gonna fall soon!”

“When it does, we’ll finish it!”

“Preparations complete!”

“We’re ready anytime!”

They looked poised to kill the phoenix in one go. Chill out, gang, it’s not that serious!

Wings severed from its body, the phoenix fell from the air along with a shower of glittering ice shards.

“Sevenfold Slash!”

“Bomb Thrust!”

“Ice Spear!”

“Gravity Smaaash!”

“Disintegrate!”

“Sever!”

“Yaaah!”

“…Hail!”

“Bolt Slash.”

My classmates all unleashed their cheat skills at the same moment, wiping out the phoenix’s HP. With a piercing cry, its light went out and it collapsed into a heap of ash.

Cheats are the best, aren’t they?

“We did it! We beat the dungeon king!”

“We won, great work!”

“We really did it!”

They’d prevailed, but it took all the power they had. Everyone was practically out of MP. Some girls even passed out as soon as the battle concluded. But a few people finally noticed what I was up to.

“Nice job! Time for mystery bird meat hot pot, okay? Just go ahead and sit down at whatever table you like. Come on, chow time, y’know?”

Everyone sat down at the tables I made in the arena and supped on my soup—made, of course, with fresh mystery fowl. The ingredients were bird meat, cabbage, and mushrooms. I would’ve loved to include some kombu, glass noodles, and tofu, too.

“Let’s eat!”

“It’s so good!”

“I’m so tired, so hungry.”

“Hot! But good!”

“Ish shooo good!”

Everyone was famished, having used up all their MP. They were also low on HP, but no one was seriously hurt. Still, I tossed in some restoration mushrooms. Any injuries they had should start to heal quickly.

“Today was a failure, so you all need to go fight the next dungeon king together too, got it? Just ’cause the bosses are so annoying and all, right?”

“We failed?!” came the shouts in response. “Why?!”

“How did we fail? We beat the dungeon king!”

“Yuh-huh!”

Jiggly wiggly!

Why was everyone so upset? *It’s so rude to talk with your mouths full. Slimey was the only one around here that understood etiquette.* He’d

spent the whole battle waiting for the feast. Of course things ended up like this.

"Huh? …What is Slimey eating?"

"Wait, I thought we beat it?"

"The phoenix was dead!"

"But that's definitely it there, right?"

"It came back to life?" everyone gasped.

A muffled caw escaped from Slimey's body.

Jiggle-jiggle jiggle!

Didn't anyone ever learn that a phoenix is reborn from its ashes? This time it happened to get eaten the moment it came back, and now Slimey was dancing with a belly full of delicious bird meat.

They failed. It was a given that they fought with bravery, intelligence, and strength. But they still tried to brute force their way through the boss fight, which showed that they still had a long way to go.

Besides, they had yet to address their weaknesses in battles against monsters. A monster, unlike a person, had no guile. Being too skeptical of its behavior led them to miss the obvious. Monsters were exactly what they seemed.

"Don't you remember the phoenix's '?' skill?" I said. "It had Revival, not Immortality. Obviously, that means the mystery skill was either Immortality or Resurrection."

"Oh, you're right."

"I mean, shouldn't that have been, like, majorly obvious? The moment you dug into the hot pot and stopped paying attention, that was the moment you lost. You should've kept your guard up and eaten onigiri, y'know?"

"We failed because of the *hot pot?!*"

Jiggle jiggle!

Apparently, the phoenix was delicious. Slimey absorbed its skills, too. That had to mean I'd spend less on food, right? *No, probably not.*

Slimey was already moving on to hot pot! He had even learned how to use chopsticks. I felt bad for Miss Armor Rep, who still struggled with them. Slimey saved us in battle, but not on food costs. He was floating as he ate his hot pot, probably a side effect of the Floating Stone.

Was that proper etiquette? I couldn't remember any books on manners ever talking about what to do when one of your guests started floating. Oh well, at least Slimey was enjoying the food. Back to the base we go!

DAY 56

AFTERNOON

Looks like the princess is skeptical of chairs?

OMUI CITY

"OH, CURSES," I said in an even monotone. "What a foul and unexpected turn of events. The job board hasn't been updated since this morning. What am I to do?"

"Why are you even here? Why even bother checking the board again after checking it this morning? And when will you learn to keep a low profile? Why is the person who isn't even an adventurer the biggest nuisance at the Adventurers' Guild?! Keep quiet, look at what you need to, and go away!"

I felt like I had a bit of a glare deficiency this morning, so I figured I'd swing by—no one gave me a flat look quite like the Receptionist Rep. Her glares, in fact, were so high quality that I had no doubt she would receive recognition from the Fantasy World Glare Association.

Can I join that noble organization? How much are the membership fees?

"Speaking of which, how the hell did you defeat a dungeon already?!"

"Well, the boss was tasty, so Slimey ate it."

"…"

Wiggle wiggle?

We'd stopped in to report that the dungeon was defeated, but since I wasn't an adventurer I was apparently only permitted to sneak a peek at the bulletin board and leave. The fact that no new requests had been added since I first started coming here made it all the more tempting to check if they had! *Am I right?*

“And that concludes our report,” said the Class Rep. “He’s doing it again!”

“Didn’t he check the job board this morning?”

“He’s definitely not trying to register as an adventurer, that’s for sure.”

“Hey, I can’t help myself!” I said. “I just need my daily dose!”

This world still hadn’t caught on to the importance of an orderly society. Morning calisthenics and a look at the bulletin board were essential parts of my daily routine. Gotta keep it clean with my daily routine, or else I’m ’boutta vent a spleen, ya know what I mean?

“Why are you rapping of a sudden?!”

“Even if I joined the guild now that I’m level 20, I still wouldn’t be allowed to enter dungeons. My lack of registration is coming entirely out of the most modest consideration for what is practical.”

“Would a modest and considerate person sneak into dungeons and then mumble-rap loudly to himself in a building he doesn’t belong in?!”

Jiggle jiggle, to the rhythm!

If adventurers weren’t required to follow the rules, the guild shouldn’t have insisted on them. Besides, I could already sell my spellstones to the guild, so I wouldn’t get anything from signing up. I didn’t want to have to sit through any kind of orientation for new adventurers. It sounded like they trained the newbies in the monster forest, but that was literally my back yard.

When my classmates registered, the sword guy and hot girls gave them the rundown. At the time, I would’ve been more than happy to participate, but I really dodged a bullet—if I *had* registered, I would’ve only been trained by gross middle-aged dudes instead of hot girls! Guarantee it!

I mean seriously, the only people in this world I met were old dudes. I should consider burying them all.

“Could you please refrain from shouting your intent to bury all middle-aged men alive in the middle of the guild hall? You’re frightening the battle-hardened adventurers!” cried the guild master.

For once, I felt like I was around a lot of women, so of course this dweeb had to show his face. *Burial time?*

"Whenever some middle-aged loser shows up, three hundred more crawl out of the woodwork behind him!"

I'll burn all their scalps bald!

"Haruka-kun, are you listening? The duke wants to see you, although I can't help but wonder why. Regardless, please go meet with him."

Did Mr. Meridad find another reason to apologize? Or maybe we had another half-naked heave-ho to deal with. Whatever it was, it was bound to be annoying. I hadn't even finished my massage chairs yet.

"I suppose it is possible that I *might* stop by for a moment if I should happen to decide to go wandering in that direction, y'know?"

"Please, I would like more assurance than that. It sounds like you have no intention of meeting with the duke."

What a pain, I thought. There was probably some sort of trouble in the kingdom. If I had to get tangled up in anything, I'd much rather it be Miss Armor Rep's arms. The bandeau and athletic shorts combo far exceeded my expectations. *She was so sexy…* I ended up mass producing them without realizing. Now that she had every color at her disposal, she would be even more radiant! *I'll show my face at the duke's palace for a couple of seconds, then retreat!*

"Ah, Your Excellency, Princess, I am delighted that you would allow me to bask in your radiant presence, though our first encounter was marred by the woefully misunderstood heave-ho situation."

"Get away from me! What are you plotting? Something creepy again, no doubt. I'm sorry, forgive me, stay away from me! No melting anything, either. Forgive me, don't touch me, stay away…"

The princess was broken again. Restoration mushrooms didn't work. Miss Armor Rep was consoling her…while giving me a death stare. *I'm the real victim! Miss Armor Rep is a terrifying dungeon emperor, not me!*

"Oh, Haruka-kun, please listen! Thank you for coming, I'm surprised you showed, and I already regret inviting you! Regardless, just listen to

me!”

The old man was yelling a half-baked apology at me again. What was his deal?

“I’m so sorry for calling you out here. The reason we summoned you is because we want you to hear the princess’s tale. If you could please refrain from harassing her any more than you already have, that would be wonderful. Why did you melt her clothes in the first place? Are you so intent on breaking her spirit?”

Oh, Merimeri was also here.

“This princess is a notable warrior renowned throughout the kingdom and beloved by the children of the land! She is praised far and wide for her courage in battle, and now she’s trembling in fear! Her fans will kill you, Haruka-kun, and they are legion!”

I didn’t want to mess with any princess stans. They’d certainly be a bigger danger than the princess herself. The princess was seriously a general too? Titles seemed meaningless in this world. It was just the other day that I met a battle-hardened knight who always lost against his wife, who *also* happened to be a ruler of the frontier and was perpetually scolded by his retainers. Was that an acceptable way to manage the frontier? I felt like the duke would get along with the meatheads. I worried for the future of this domain.

“Haruka-sama, I must apologize,” said the Royal Girl. “Allow me to introduce myself once more. I am Shalliceres, general of the army you defeated. No need for titles. I felt as if I was in danger, though it was more like embarrassment than danger, or perhaps a greater shame than I had ever felt, inflicted in the most humiliating possible fashion. You did lend me a dress after my clothing was destroyed, but it was the most revealing dress I had ever seen, and then you said you wanted to give me an ALL NIGHT FEVER, didn’t you?! That dress was so indecent that I felt more clothed after my clothes melted off my body, but I suppose you got what you wanted, even if you didn’t get to do your FEVER! You wanted me to—LET’S DANCE!— didn’t you?! PERFECT! UNBELIEVABLE! I’M FEELING THAT FEVER! MARVELOUS!”

She rampaged around the room, while Slimey jiggled.

Was this kingdom okay? It was not an encouraging sign that one of their generals was the type of girl to shout, “Let’s dance all night, yeah, FEVER!” without explanation. Even Slimey went over to soothe her. She kept muttering to herself about how she would do an “unbelievable combo, experiencing a miracle! Let’s dance all night! MARVELOUS!”

Why did they summon me here again?

“I must ask you,” said the Royal Girl. “Why did you intervene to try to save the frontier? It has nothing to do with you, so why would you go so far as to make an enemy of the kingdom?”

“Huh? Save? Look, if you asked me to help out, I’d do it for anyone besides this old guy over here, but I’m not saving anyone. In fact, can you save me? Because this combination lecture, rant, and rampage should be aimed at the nerds and idiotic meatheads. They’re the ones who deserve it, y’know?”

They certainly didn’t deserve salvation. There was nothing about that in the Bible. People who saved themselves got saved. Everyone knew that —God, other people, and me, too. I just felt happiest when other people were happy. All my actions stemmed from that philosophy, y’know?

I wasn’t trying for the sake of other people. I was saving myself, which involved helping other people, and when everybody did it together, then duh, everyone gets saved! The frontier still had nothing to do with me. Wasn’t my fault that whacking goblins and selling spellstones made me happy, so I ended up doing a lot of that stuff. *It’s not my fault, I swear.*

“Then why did you exterminate every monster in the forest? Why did you put yourself in so much danger?”

“Uh, you see, my house is kind of in the middle of the monster forest and I didn’t want any goblin neighbors, y’know?”

If you saw a goblin skulking by your home, you’d smash it too, right? They were a pain, so I got rid of them.

“Your…house? You *live* in the monster forest?”

“Yeah, I’ve even got myself a nice garden going.”

After all that work I put into making the garden, I hadn’t even gone back once. I still needed to give Slimey a tour. I was a shut-in that couldn’t

even shut himself in!

"Um, well…I mean, so then why did you stop the monster horde?"

"Look, they kept calling it a horde, but the monsters literally showed up one at a time. One every .01 seconds, but still, one at a time? And no good items from it, either!"

"Right…and you also conquered the Ultimate Dungeon?"

"Conquered? I fell in a pit and climbed back up."

I had *no regrets* from that, because I encountered the most wonderful person in the world at the bottom! *And I get another wonderful encounter with her every night! Tonight, too! I'll encounter her wearing clothes and witness her taking them off!*

"So why did you cut off the frontier from the kingdom and build your own dungeon and fortress?!"

"I didn't cut anything off! I just ran away because they were after me. They're always after me, those old dudes! I should've buried 'em! Look, I read every lawbook I could find and there was no rule against building your own dungeon, so I built one for my own purposes. And if the duke was cool with it, then everything was gravy, y'know? Not that I asked for permission, but he hasn't said anything otherwise, so it's all fine, y'know?"

"B-but that's in direct opposition to the kingdom!"

"Yeah, but they're our enemy. I mean, do you *not* oppose your enemies?"

Who else was I supposed to oppose? My allies? Total strangers? That made no sense.

"But if you're not…not our enemy…why?"

I'd like to check out the capital. Walk around the city, get some food. I wondered what the specialties were there. But outside of that, I had no interest in this whatever-it's-called kingdom ruled by whoever-it-is. It had nothing to do with me. I didn't even know the kingdom's name.

Meridad said, "Princess Shalliceres, this is the truth, and you'll simply have to accept it. You see, Haruka-kun harbors no ill will. He was

only willing to destroy you because you stood in his way. He isn't a rebel: he has no interest in the kingdom, one way or another.

"If the kingdom didn't get in his way, he wouldn't have cared. Simply put, if anything gets in his way, whether kingdom or dungeon, he will eliminate it. He would do the same to the aristocrats, and even the king. And as a result, the frontier folk are happy. He simply eliminated all obstacles to a happy life."

Did that old man just blame me for everything that happened?!

"This is merely the hypothesis of a certain noble girl, but Haruka-kun must believe that if he eliminates all the tragedies, calamities, and iniquities that plague us, from vile sorcery to the crime of poverty, that the world will become a happy place."

Was the geezer still talking? I'd probably die of old age before he shut his mouth. In the meantime, I decided to make a few prototypes. I made a chair, strapped a spellstone imbued with Vibration magic to it, and got it whirring. The biggest problem was the payment box—I wanted it to activate only when someone put in money. It should've been trivial, but it was turning into a real headache. Was one silver coin for a minute a fair price? One silver coin was worth a hundred ele, which was analogous to a hundred yen, give or take. *In that case, maybe two minutes?* Two minutes wasn't much, so I settled on three. If that didn't bring in customers, I'd lower the price from there. It would be a pain to change all the signage, but I needed a constant stream of customers to make a profit. Yeah, this was goo—who-oa-a-a-aaa, it-t-t's s-s-s-serious-s-s-ly v-v-vib-rating!

"Put simply, the kingdom forced the issue. The course chosen by the king and the nobles will only lead to their own destruction. If it is the wealth of the dungeons they desire, they should conquer dungeons themselves. It couldn't be more obvious that those who conquer dungeons are more dangerous than the dungeons themselves. If you still choose to provoke him, he will obliterate you. That's that. Although, if I may draw our attention this way, what has Haruka-kun been doing this whole time? I realized a while ago that he stopped listening, but where did he get that chair from? Oh my, this feels marvelous!"

Ahhhhhhhhh! It'd take too long to explain, so I just had him sit in the chair. I knew it. Once they got this old, geezers like this guy loved nothing

more than massage chairs. I'd put them all over his palace. I had a feeling that he'd request their installation himself before long.

Soon enough, a whole crowd of people lined up to be the next person to sit in the chair. I ran some quick calculations, and this was a way better return on investment than making food. Ten of these should be good for now. There were lots of old dudes in the duke's palace.

"Ahhhhhhhhh!"

Even the princess seemed to like it: "I-I'm a believer!" she roared.

It was quite the experience, wasn't it? Glad she approved.

Why did they call for me again? Not that I was complaining; the massage chairs were already making me rich. Still, anyone wanna remind me?

DAY 56

EVENING

I should've known better than to expect anything from them.

OMUI CITY

IN A SHOCKING TWIST, the nerds actually proposed a logical plan. They knew exactly how to make composite bows and they had the skills to do it. The nerds knew a lot about the secrets of weapon crafting. They were so weird and clueless that they were only well-informed about the most specific possible things. Enough so that you'd have to question the very meaning of their existence, as you'd question the meaning of the random items they made in their workshop. *Those are the nerds for you!*

"What are you saying?! Animal ears and composite bows are the true path!"

"And what about an elf girl using a composite bow?! Is that not an equally true path?"

"You absolute buffoons. There is nothing purer than a little girl wielding an oversized composite bow!"

"What?!"

"This is a world of swords and sorcery! That means that the composite bow is most glorious in the hands of a magical girl!"

"All of the girls are magical in this world," I pointed out. "You didn't specify anyone in particular, y'know?"

"Shut up!"

I didn't know why I expected anything from them. Was I getting too lazy?

"Right, I should've expected as much from you as I expect from goblins," I sighed. "Although even goblins can do some basic woodworking. Not a bow, but they know how to put together a good club, and that's better than you nerds!"

They left the iron plates and lumber untouched on the ground. They hadn't even started to process the lumber, let alone cast the iron fittings! The materials were just sitting there.

"We'll get to it, Haruka-kun!"

"We're still working out the finer points of the design."

"Just make a composite bow!" I shouted. "If you choose idiocy, then I'll choose Hair Whorl!"

"Well, the concept art matters here!"

They were arguing over what kind of girl should be holding the composite bow in their drawing—whether a girl with animal ears or a little girl.

"We haven't even encountered any little girls with animal ears, so rather than slobbering over things that don't exist, make some bows for our classmates! Why are you making equipment for girls who don't exist?!"

I decided to inform the girls about the nerds' predilections. I couldn't believe they were prioritizing bows for animal-eared girls, little girls, and elves over our own classmates.

"Those designs are nothing but conceited contrarian concoctions! How about some more concordance! Just make it properly!"

The nerds were picking up their jaws off the floor. *I don't like that look in your eyes, damn it!*

"That's it! A little girl with animal ears!"

"You come up with some great ideas, Haruka-kun!"

"No, shut up, go home! You guys don't even deserve to live in a fantasy world!"

Conversation was a waste of effort. I knew that much. Instead, I kicked them, stepped on them, and crushed them under my heel until they finished up with the design.

"Potential and kinetic energy… You're using a pulley system on a bow? I thought you were designing a composite bow, and you just handed me blueprints for a compound bow!"

"Well, we just finished," the nerds said.

“It looks cool, doesn’t it? Besides, the strength needed to draw an arrow was cut in half, so it’ll be super accurate! Besides, it’s cool!”

“Uh, the girls’ Power is over 900, y’know?” I said. “You didn’t need to cut the draw weight that much. Try cutting my workload in half, instead! You said that it’s cool twice, so I know why you really modified it!”

I studied their schematics: they drew a little girl with cat ears holding a bow.

“Draw the damn bow! Your efforts were clearly focused elsewhere!”

“This is our concept art!”

“I can’t see the details on the bow design!” I shouted.

A Japanese bow or a Turkish bow would be the easiest to make. I had bamboo, but I was busy using that to make spears to stab the nerds with, so a small Turkish bow was the best choice. It was a kind of recurved composite bow that used a strong material that compressed well for the inner side, with a flexible layer on the outer side. It had a compact W-shape, with limbs that curved away from the archer when unstrung, that stored more energy and fired with more speed than typical straight-limbed bows.

“Ah, so the outer layer behaves like rubber, and the inner layer compresses like a spring. Pretty high-tech, isn’t it?”

“These bows have been used for over two thousand years,” Nerd A said. “They were made with animal tendons and glue, which meant that they would get ruined in the rain.”

What useless knowledge. Even the information that should have been useful to them in a fantasy world had turned out useless. Because this bow was turning out to be something else altogether!

“Why would you make a bow without wood? It’s a bow!”

“Well, we made this using the iron and leather, and… Oops, did we forget to make a wooden core?”

“It just seemed so bendy even with all that iron!”

They had crafted a whip out of iron and leather. The nerds were staring at it with intense curiosity.

“How about I deliver that to the Class Rep so she can discipline you nerds?”

“No way! Too scary!”

It was annoying to even give them a hard time about it—how could they forget about the wood when making a bow?! Where did all of their extensive knowledge of bow-crafting go to? Did it die in the concept art?!

Despite all the trial and error, prototyping, and testing that we went through, I still wasn’t able to shoot the nerds. *Damn it, I can’t get through their Composite Barrier!*

“All right, there we go, this should be more than enough…”

“You made over two hundred! We don’t have that many classmates!” the nerds cried.

“Look, I’ve had trouble reining in my tentacles lately. They tend to do things of their own accord.”

“That’s horrifying!”

Please don’t hold the fact that I made over two hundred leotards against me, because it wasn’t my fault. Probably not my fault, anyway.

If I’d added enchantments, nothing on the market would be able to match these bows. They might even be better than some dungeon treasures. I made them, after all! How could they fail?

The best item that anyone made today was the whip, which really pissed me off. It increased Power, Speed, and Dexterity by 50% without even using a spellstone!

The nerds tried to mass-produce their whips, but they ended up with tables. The leather coating was pretty sexy on a table, and they were built low like coffee tables. The nerds stared at their newly produced tables with blank, confused expressions. *I shouldn’t have expected anything from these guys…*

Those leather coffee tables went on to be sold as high-end merchandise at the general store. The nerds would continue to stare at them with blank expressions. *Guys, they aren’t whips. You can’t sell them at the armory!*

“I’m back! I gathered everyone, so I’m going to start selling the bows I made. If you wanna test them out, I’ve gathered the nerds in the back gardens. No worries if you end up hitting them, right? I applied some anti-Barrier enchantments, so you might even be able to take them out!”

“The nerds already ran away!” the girls chorused.

“No duh!”

Once all the girls were equipped with bows, it was open season on nerds! It was a good way to train, in my opinion, but everyone was mad at me instead for some reason. Maybe chasing after the nerds was too irritating, especially since waiting to snipe them would get the job done just as well.

“These are bows? They have a weird shape.”

“What are they?”

“They’re big. Colorful, too.”

“So many color options. I don’t know what to pick.”

“OMG, the fur handle is totally adorable!”

Even the girls got pulled in by the concept art.

“The small model is for the speedier people on the front lines, and the longbows are for the rearguard. It packs more power, but the small model is faster on the draw, y’know?”

The targets had escaped, so we practiced on regular targets instead. They were super accurate even from a distance, and the release velocity was so fast that they hit with extra force. Even my greatest concerns were relieved, because the meatheads insisted on chasing after their own arrows. *I don’t know whether to be relieved, or just sad.*

Then we ate dinner while discussing dungeon raiding and training plans. Midway through, someone from Stalker Girl’s clan showed up.

“The kingdom is planning to declare war. Their goal is the capture of Omui. The nobles have formed a coalition army. We have already informed Duke Omui. We believe their army will arrive here in two weeks at the earliest.”

War was declared. *They're making a mistake*.

DAY 56

NIGHT

This isn't ill will, much less elitism, scorn, indifference, manipulation, or…anything. So how am I the bad guy?

THE WHITE LOSER INN

INTERLUDE: GIRLS' MEETING

EVERYONE WAS COMPLETELY worn out. We dragged ourselves to the bath to wash away the sweat and mud from our bodies. We had all overshot our limits. *We couldn't help it. It was a bargain sale!*

"This sportswear is *sooo* comfortable!"

"There were even sports bras!"

"And they're both soft and sturdy."

"I'm sure he did *plenty* of testing on Angelica-san!"

Everyone entered the demilitarized zone clutching their battle loot. It was a vicious battle with no honor or humanity, but we were back to being friends again. After the bath, we would probably go to one of our rooms and start a fashion show. Different sizing aside, it was all the same stuff, but we couldn't help ourselves. It was too much fun!

"Ahhhhh."

"This bath is heaven, but I want to try on the clothes already!"

"Complicated girl feelings!"

"I wanna do a fashion show!"

Meanwhile, Angelica-san revealed all sorts of secrets of the new outfits' creation, about the fitting and measurement measures that were of course code words for a very different kind of fitting. And we heard a lot of extra-special fitting-room secrets.

"He even measured the thickness and density of the fabric threads?"

“That’s so precise!”

“He did talk about draping and whatnot, right?”

“They fit so well!”

But Angelica-san had done more of the 18+ fitting variety, trying on (and taking off) new outfits in a display that penetrated deep into the night. Haruka-kun reportedly found no problems with any of the clothes, but had a very big problem with (the big parts of) the girl trying them on, and completely lost control.

Even after his profits from selling the bows today, he had already spent everything. Of course, his savings were gone. At least we had these wonderful bows. They could shoot straight for almost a kilometer, and he said he even made enchanted arrows for them. We didn’t have enough ranged firepower in our battle against the phoenix today; this would transform our entire approach to combat. Since the arrows had to be replaced, though, using them could get expensive.

“He also bullied Oda-kun and the others today, didn’t he?”

“It’s his hobby at this point. He’s the only one who messes with them.”

“Despite all the bullying, they looked pretty confused.”

Oda-kun and his friends had a wall up with everyone besides Haruka-kun. They deeply distrusted other people, and the wounds in their hearts inspired them to take everything in this world far too seriously. Deadly seriously.

“I heard this from Haruka-kun,” I said, “but Oda-kun and his friends, since they went through so much bullying growing up, they can actually see right through most people. So, when Haruka-kun and Kakizaki-kun’s group always said, ‘the nerds know best,’ that’s where that’s coming from.”

“Is that friendship? Possibly?”

After I told Haruka-kun about my Hijack skill, he said “the nerds say there’s no issue so there’s no issue.” Those four kids, raised on mistrust and fear—Haruka-kun trusted them so much that he even decided to stay in Omui based on their judgment. He saw right into their hearts, and they embraced him.

“Does the fact that they’re embracing the most villainous, disdainful, contemptuous, manipulative scoundrel around mean he’s actually none of those things?”

“They’re almost like puppies!”

“Yeah, like a bunch of little kids up to some mischief.”

“Even Haruka-kun seems like another kid when he’s with them, doesn’t he?”

His actual actions were the very height of kindness and generosity, but he tried to play them off as cruel, villainous, scornful, and unfeeling. Oda-kun and his friends had been attached to Haruka-kun for a long time. Now they had come to a fantasy world together, and approached him, got bullied by him, and so on, in a never-ending cycle. Not too different from the rest of us.

“Don’t you think Kakizaki-kun’s group has kind of changed personalities?” asked Vice Rep B.

“They used to be so icy, but they’re like puppies nowadays.”

“Haruka-kun just keeps teasing them and calling them barbarians and cavemen.”

“Anytime he makes them something new, that’s all they use.”

“Could it be…a romance?” the girls gasped.

“That would turn this isekai into a BL story!”

“He calls them stupid over and over again, but they *were* stupidly happy after he made them their tracksuits.”

Kakizaki-kun and his friends used to be totally brusque and cold, but somewhere along the lines, those walls fell down with a clatter, leaving something else altogether. They retained their constant hairpin reflexes, but any sense of cleverness or callousness was completely gone. And when Haruka-kun was around, they just acted like dogs, tails wagging.

“Haruka-kun is totally different too. Back then he was just muttering to himself all the time, and now he’s all excuses and ‘ya know?’”

“He defied my expectations the most, yeah!”

He never talked or associated with anyone. He definitely never got close to anyone. He was so afraid of losing people that he made sure to never have anyone he could lose. But he was forced to get close to all of us, and that had turned him into a total worrywart. He was so embarrassed about it that he tried desperately to hide it. It was adorable.

Angelica-san was laughing, hearing these old stories about Haruka-kun. I guessed she was more attached to him than anyone else. She had experienced eternal solitude, so she could understand better than anyone else that warmth and that shyness. Even Slimey stuck to Haruka-kun.

"But we *failed*!" everyone shouted.

"How were we supposed to know about Rebirth!"

"We should've seriously just eaten the onigiri, girlfriends," sighed Vice Rep B. "With Haruka-kun's rice balls in our bods, we would've passed with flying colors."

I don't think our choice of lunch was the problem.

How could we have resisted the alluring scent of fresh mystery bird meat soup? All that calorie-stuffed collagen… Maidens didn't stand a chance.

"The hot pot was so good."

"Not a single drop remained!"

We weren't expecting ponzu sauce to show up. That was what really pushed it over the top. How long had he been making ponzu? He said he was going to start selling gyoza bento boxes tomorrow, so all I could think about was having enough cash tomorrow to buy some. He also introduced fur accessories, and Angelica-san even got a fur hat. Those would probably go on sale too, and I wasn't going to miss out on them!

"This world is weirdly fun."

"It feels wrong to say it, but yeah."

The hottest upcoming stock was the wonderful fur bag series. I was dying to have one, but I wouldn't be able to afford it if it came out at the same time as new underwear. *Don't keep us waiting, Haruka-kun!*

Currently, there was a ban on uninvited visitors in our rooms so nobody could rush in unannounced. Everyone constantly trying on low-cut dresses and fishnet tights made for a dangerous situation. In fact, if we kept on wearing fishnet tights and low-cut dresses late into the night, Haruka-kun would probably "accidentally" Teleport into the room and I'd run away screaming. I mean, he was constantly horny, but definitely harmless.

"We're up to floor 48 of 50 in that dungeon full of bugs," I said. "I really hate that place."

"Don't talk about those bugs!" everyone squealed. "They're so gross!"

Fortunately, we hadn't run into the "G" yet. Yes, everyone's worst nightmare—the Japanese giant water bug, which we'd encountered in the Ultimate Dungeon. It was ridiculously fast and twitchy. Even Haruka-kun said that if one of those showed up, he'd run away—so we literally had no hope against one!

"We need to practice with our new bows…and make more money so we don't go bankrupt."

"Yeah, I heard Haruka-kun's got a whole new line of enchanted anklets in store!"

"And enchanted underwear, even if they're weak effects. The bow's effects are incredible!"

"He's basically an artificer at this point, right?"

Working on spellstone crafting eventually led him to start making weapons. Now he was mass-producing incredibly high-end weapons, and his side-job was supplying our main needs. And because of all his investments, he was constantly complaining about being out of money…but we all knew very well that he wasn't just a big spender, he was making the whole economy move.

"He works way too hard."

"He's already bankrupt by the time he gets free time."

There were certain facts that couldn't be ignored. For example, that our cheat skills had limits. Or that it was impossible to mass-produce tens of thousands of new items per night. Or that it was impossible to create a

literal fortress, no matter how good you were at Earth magic. And sure, he had Supreme Thinking to make things easier, but his abilities were still beyond human limits. It wasn't a mass-production cheat. It was something greater.

Actually, we had all tried our hands at crafting and cooking, but it was faster for most of us to do things by hand. If we couldn't do a given task by hand, it was too hard to visualize for the magic. That was how magic worked here—if it took ten minutes to fry something, you'd need to use magic for ten minutes, too. So how the hell was he making two hundred meals in a single minute?! His hot pot today popped out of nowhere. The way his magic worked was totally beyond all understanding.

Jiggle jiggle!

"Intruder!" the girls shouted.

"Slimey, nice job today!"

Boing boing!

Slimey trespassed right into the bath with us. Maybe he felt like he hadn't gotten enough attention today, but he was rampaging around the bath, ramming himself at us. He was a dungeon king that acted no different from a beloved pet.

After our bath, we had a girls' meeting in my room. To be precise, we had an underwear fashion show. Most of the lingerie was on the sporty side, and we only had one or so per person to show off…but the shorts were still adorable! We should've realized the charm of athletic shorts sooner!

"This means additional orders, right?"

"Duh, add that to the agenda!"

Uh, didn't we talk about how Haruka-kun was working too hard…? Still, you couldn't overcome this uproar. The spandex shorts were so cute and made for perfect loungewear. He went with sports bras to avoid measuring any of us, so we'd likely have to wait to order those.

"He's so generous. And degenerate!"

"I know! I'm getting, like, ripped off to the max…but who cares!"

Everyone was bursting with gossip. *Twenty-one teenage girls, what did you expect? Oh, plus one Slime.* We kept talking and talking as the night wore on.

No one brought up the topic of war. Sure, it was scary, but we were hardly running away from it. We were all ready to fight. We just didn't want to talk about it. It wasn't easy to talk about killing people.

DAY 56

NIGHT

Now that's burned into my memory, I better hurry up and distract the others before they get mad at me.

THE WHITE LOSER INN

BACK GARDEN

I WRAPPED MYSELF with pure magic, imbued it with more magic, and activated my skills. Overlapping and layering all the types of magic, I aligned their polarities. I controlled the somatic components and the invocations, patching together every combination of my skills—and crashed into my limit. My Magic Entanglement unraveled before I could even move an inch. *The moment I make a move, either the imbuement fails, or I destroy my body.*

"Fuuuhh!"

I activated Magic Entanglement as I breathed out. I still had more I could do—I still had more magic left to bring into it.

"This is tough! I guess I haven't unlocked the secrets of Teleportation or Gravity…"

Gravity still eluded me. Alchemy made things more complicated than ever.

I tried to imbue myself with waves of magic power, used Holding on my own body, and controlled my limbs with Blockhead. I took a few steps, swung my staff a couple times, and stopped.

That was enough to obliterate my body. Fortunately, Revival kept me alive, but it barely kept pace with the rate of destruction. Something was wrong, something in how I used it… What was the issue?

"Maybe my life is the issue?! I'm only sixteen, and my whole life is an error? What am I supposed to do about that?!"

It's strange, I thought. I hadn't done anything wrong and yet my whole life was wrong. Because even though I didn't do anything wrong, my sex appeal was on the verge of complete dissolution. *How truly mysterious.*

I was a long way away, so far away that I doubted I would ever master it. Maybe I'd gotten too greedy? But if I imbued myself with all of my skills, I should've been able to pull it off… If I couldn't even use Life or Death in this condition, the only other option for me would be to level up. That was necessary to raise my base stats. Problem was, it was almost impossible to raise my level in the first place. How to level up… My best option to fight would be Life or Death with Magic Entanglement. Entangle myself in all of my skills, and then cut my enemy down. Not only was it my best bet, but it was my *only* bet.

"It's more an issue of getting used to it rather than learning how it's done, but I've gotta self-destruct in order to get used to it… Guess you could call it a gentle suicide? A pleasant suicide? Maybe a healthy self-destruction?"

I collapsed instantly. General Health helped me out, and I had done my radio calisthenics and everything, but my body couldn't handle the burden. My stats couldn't keep up with my skills, so it was only natural that I would self-destruct, and that's why I had to use Magic Entanglement in the first place…but my body couldn't keep up with Magic Entanglement either. It was a paradox.

I trained with Miss Armor Rep back at the guild, but her speed—as swift as light—was too fast. Maybe it was the Teleportation taking effect, or perhaps she was just reaching instantaneous-motion level speeds. She was strong, but still weak. Her movements were so sharp, nearly impossible to read, which left me more vulnerable in return. With all my evasive and speed skills, I was still able to get by, but I had less control over my movements than ever. This was getting bad.

Meanwhile, my body kept going through a cycle of self-destruction and revival. I was covered in bruises from internal bleeding, as I could barely keep my skills going for any extended period of time. I had no endurance.

"I guess the speed of self-destruction is greater than that of Revival…" I sighed.

My skill levels continued to go up, but that just further increased the gap between my skills and my stats, which made the burden on my body even greater.

"I'm only getting more problems and fewer solutions, which is an unhelpful, unfortunate, and unsustainable course, of course."

Well, if I could just get things to work, I had a feeling that things would go very well. But things weren't going well, so they didn't progress, and I ended up in trouble instead. *Time to think things over in the bath,* I decided. *Tragically, it's not the kind of bubbly, steamy bath that teenage boys dream of*. My jacuzzi was back in my cave, but there was only one place presently set up for my newly developed bubble bath soap: the inn.

"Because under that armor, there are all sorts of dreams and charms and body parts…"

Nowadays, Slimey spent most of his time with the girls in their baths and didn't even come to hang. This inn, no, this whole world was a part of a caste society. A caste system that had teenage boys firmly at the bottom! Because the girls had the *big* bath! The guys' bath was tiny in comparison! Well, my body was so broken, bloody, and bruised that I certainly couldn't show it to anyone, so I supposed I should have been glad the bath was small. Plus, I didn't want space for the other guys in here anyway. That would definitely not be fun!

"Aaaaah. I've never been to heaven, but I think this is what it feels like. Probably?"

Since all the roads and floors tended to be made of stone in this world, I was glad that it didn't matter if the floor got wet, nor did it matter if I made some minor adjustments… Oops. Did I just make a hot tub? That hole definitely wasn't there before. *Teenage boys can't help ourselves. We love bubbles! Even for a solo bath!*

Objective: complete. I did it. Mission successful, 100% clear. Having a wooden bathtub was seriously relaxing. I'd never been in one before, so I had no idea how relaxing it would be. *Time to start building more.* A hot tub was magnificent, but not as calming as this. Because this place produced bubbles fierce enough to bubble up the body of this guy's dreams… Just turning the hot tub jets on was the very opposite of calming and gentle.

“All right, so we get about two weeks to prepare, and then that’s the end of that. There’s literally no military or political or strategic way they can win this… So, what are they after?”

How foolish could this kingdom get? Like, I knew they were fools, and the guy leading them was the crowned king of fools. *Now that sounds like an actual title!*

Jiggle jiggle!

Oh, Slimey showed up to headbutt me. He bounced right off of me. So adorable. He was over in the girls’ bath a little while ago, probably jiggling over there with them, too. I pet Slimey.

“I’d better start my side-job for today, then. Ah, but this is bliss!”

Wiggle wiggle.

I didn’t need to go to the workshop to craft any more bows, since I already made a huge amount. I could probably forge some swords, though. I wanted to make sure that whatever I made was high quality. I’d need to learn the principles of smithing, but learning from the nerds sounded like a massive waste of time. Why didn’t I have any ordinary serious people in sight, anywhere around me? Jeez.

Then there was the unresolved question of the girls’ bras, which it would be a great relief to solve. Making them put all sorts of very large and challenging thoughts into my brain, but thanks to those thoughts, I was able to achieve large and challenging things. *I’m innocent here, I swear.* Still, with the level of elasticity and form-fitting qualities in my sports bra design, maybe wasn’t supportive enough. Besides, I expected additional orders. I knew some of those assets would stretch the limits of even magic materials! They were about to pop out!

Then there was the upcoming war. Although, even if no war broke out, the new weapons wouldn’t go to waste. And I wouldn’t mind if they *did* go to waste, as that’d mean peace. The armory guy needed to strike a balance to keep his sales up, and the duke’s army needed more equipment. Currently they were equipped with weapons specialized for fighting monsters, which pretty much disregarded defense in favor of mobility and were generally way too lightweight for a battle against other soldiers.

“That was pretty dangerous when Merimeri-san and Mr. Meridad got attacked before, right?”

Jiggle!

Despite an overwhelming advantage in strength, Mr. Meridad just defended himself, without even bothering to attack. Which meant that he probably didn’t have equipment that could resist poison or other status ailments. The frontier was still poor, then, and he was the kind of ruler who prioritized the wellbeing of the people over his own finances. Still, he couldn’t ride into battle equipped like that. He even granted me 100% of the mining rights, which meant that I made insane profits, and I had iron ore to spare.

I had installed twelve massage chairs in his palace, which were seriously raking in dough for me. Maybe when I gave equipment to the soldiers, they would let me install chairs in their personal homes—now that was the business opportunity of a lifetime. *Time to make some more chairs just in case.*

“So, I’ll prioritize Ailment Resistance, Defense, and Vitality. Iron isn’t great for enchanting, so I’ll crush some spellstones and knead them into the equipment…I don’t really like the idea of working so hard on equipment for old dudes, though. There’s something else I’d much rather knead and knead, over and over again. Miss Armor Rep has a leotard waiting—anyway, have to focus on the equipment!”

I really don’t have much motivation for this crap, I thought. If the soldiers were beautiful women, then that could perk me up. Oh yeah, the princess got her equipment melted, so I better prepare more for her…with the required twists. That sight was seared into my memory, so I didn’t even need to take measurements, I had her measurements down to the centimeter. Her body was burnt into my memory and perfectly preserved. Seriously, *super* well preserved.

“Still, can’t scorn the general store lady. She never fails to zero in on whatever has zero stock. And can’t be ordered. Seriously, a village? I just built her a damn house and now she wants a village?! What’s with these crazy orders, and why do I accept them? But I can’t turn her down. Because…that village, it was destroyed. They lost everything. Fine then, I’ll

build it back, it was my fault after all, I'll do it… I can't turn her down… Seriously, what am I doing?"

DAY 56

LATE NIGHT

It is my right to remain silent, but I will precisely, firmly, resolutely carve my failure into the stone.

DESTROYED VILLAGE

I MUSTERED AS MUCH MAGIC as I could, and before it flew out of control, I moved to channel all of it into the ground. That's what it was gonna take to get this village back. I certainly wasn't going to let it get destroyed again, I can tell you that.

I didn't think that doing this would cleanse me of my sin. If my newly rebuilt village was destroyed again, what sort of salvation could I possibly qualify for? Not that I deserved any, but this was the best I could do. So many of the villagers who lived here had died, so this was all I could do for the survivors. I couldn't save them, couldn't protect them. I couldn't do anything. I had to do this and only this.

"Aren't you two sleepy? You didn't need to come with me. This is nothing dangerous. I'm just building a village. You'll only get bored watching."

Shake-shake.

Wiggle wiggle.

I was accompanied by the usual duo. I'd cleared a lot more of the monster forest, so this area was completely safe. Even before it was cleared, there were only goblins, kobolds, and meatheads lurking in this area. Well, now it was past midnight, so if I saw the meatheads running around, I'd be concerned, but everything would still be fine—aside from their brains. No helping those.

I enclosed the town's area with ramparts with watchtowers. If they'd had these ramparts, they would've made it, they would've survived. But it was too late for that—as always—so I built the walls to be robust and sturdy. It was the least I could do. *I'm so stupid.*

I built the gates, laid out a network of roads, and constructed some granaries and barns. The population of the village had been cut in half, so all this new infrastructure might be a pain, but they'd have room to grow and prosper. This was urban renewal, after all. They lost everything—so many lives, their homes, and their wealth—their will to persevere. It was painful to even stand here.

"I also built a mill, so they'll get rich in no time. Even an Orc King couldn't topple these walls. I imbued plenty of spellstones in the walls to repel monsters." I stared at my new creations. "This time…this time they'll survive…"

I was almost out of MP, but I felt like I was forgetting something. *What am I missing? Is this enough? Will this even work?* I worried. Most importantly…would this village truly ever be able to return to happiness? After what happened…of course not. How could they?

Before going back, I built a small monument in a remote corner of the village. It was nothing more than an act of penance, but the villagers needed this. The fact that I made it was a shameful act of cowardice. It was barely worthy as a monument to the dead. I carved the names of those who died into the stone. I borrowed the village's register of names from the duke's palace, and carved each name in sequence.

"I'm sorry… I'm sorry… I'm sorry… I'm sorry… I'm sorry… I'm sorry…"

At some point the sun started to rise, but I kept carving their names. All seventy-nine of them, seventy-nine names carved into the stone. Seventy-nine broken lines. Seventy-nine lives to carve.

Sunlight filled the valley, but I kept carving. This was my memorial to them. I had to do it. I etched each name into the stone. Suddenly, *whap!* Someone bonked me from behind.

"Hey! I knew you were there. Why'd you hit me? I'm doing what I have to do! Is it morning already?"

I worked through the night without sleeping again. *Damn it.*

"Why are you crying? Stop crying already! You have no reason to apologize. You're not the one that set monsters loose on the village! You're the one who stopped the monsters and saved countless lives! You took revenge on the monsters for all of us, didn't you? So why are you crying like that? Why are you apologizing like that?!"

The general store lady was up early. She brought villagers with her, too.

"You already built the village… Why didn't you at least wait until morning?"

Uhh… Why didn't I?

"I knew you would make it. So, after finishing preparations for the villagers last night, I sent in the order. But I knew you would run away to avoid getting credit. You didn't want to have to face the survivors, right? Every time they try to thank you, you run from them, bury yourself in more work, shove away the monetary rewards the duke tries to give you! You're always running away!"

I didn't want them to apologize to me. I just killed the monsters. I didn't save anybody. And we were standing among the tombs of seventy-nine people! They had already died. I should have recognized what was coming, but it hadn't so much as registered on my radar. I recognized that there was something strange with the forest…and yet my classmates killed each other. I couldn't have anyone apologizing to me. I needed them to punish me! I didn't deserve to be thanked!

“You’re making light of the frontier—and all of its people! No one hates you—no one begrudges you! Our people aren’t such scum! Yes, we’re poor…poor and weak. We have no weapons, nothing to protect ourselves. Unlike you, we couldn’t fight against the monster forest—we could barely kill the monsters, that’s how poor and weak and vulnerable we are. But there’s not a single person in the frontier that you can think so little of.” She flung her hand toward the monument. “And the same goes for all seventy-nine of them! They’re all better people than you think they are, goddamn it!”

What was she saying? I couldn’t understand her. The surviving villagers surrounded me and stared.

“Those seventy-nine people are heroes. You think they’re weak, see them as nothing more than the victims of a monster attack, just in the wrong place at the wrong time, unable to buy time—but they risked their lives in battle! Even the elderly ran out with their kitchen knives. They’re heroes, can’t you see it?! Heroes!”

“But, I should’ve known that the monsters wouldn’t just stay in the forest…that they would come out…I could’ve at least supplied these heroes…”

“Not a single person here would ever demean your heroism by accepting your apologies!” she roared. “Everyone here is prepared to die! They lived expecting to perish! They don’t *need* to forgive you!”

“But it’s not like they wanted to die. They all wanted to live, surely. Those heroes, they died.”

“Don’t you get it?! Your only obligation is that you accept their gratitude! If the survivors can’t thank you, those who fought would’ve all died in vain! These heroes gave up their lives in the hopes that the survivors would be saved! Their hopes came to life in *you!* You made their sacrifice into reality! You made their dying wishes come true! How dare you apologize to them! What do you think you’re doing, beating your chest, apologizing? You *saved* them! You can’t apologize! You haven’t done anything that demands an apology, and no one, I say *no one*, resents you. Everyone is *thanking you*.” She sighed. “Don’t you get it?”

“Thank you so much!” the villagers shouted in unison.

I had no words. I didn't know what to say. I couldn't even apologize. But apparently, it was my duty to not apologize.

I couldn't offer my sorrow to the dead, but I still wrote in the stone:

"A grave for fallen warriors, enshrining our debt for the sacrifice of these heroes."

Slimey wiggled pensively.

"Yeah, I know. The villagers have their village again…time to go back."

People were waiting for me. I'd spent all my MP, and I was famished. *So, what's for lunch?*

DAY 57

NOON

With such an off-the-charts power stat, this whole world should be scared.

OMUI CITY

THIS WAS THE WORST! I was caught completely off-guard. No allies today, either. It was my day off, so after stopping by the armory I was way too carefree…and I let my guard down.

They surrounded me, cutting off all escape routes. I didn't even have enough runway to escape with Airwalk. I was doomed. And in the hands of my worst enemies—no, how could I possibly have expected it? My care, my judgment—apparently, I never had it to begin with. I had my precautions and Presence Detection focused on the wrong enemy. I thought there were no enemies nearby, I really did. And they had the worst possible weapon in hand. *Additional orders!*

"I just spent all night last night building a town! I was also hard at work on other activities, but mostly, a town! That's right, I worked all night, disregarding my fiery passions! Seriously! So don't get mad at me, I had to clear the field from scratch!"

I had plenty of orders left—already a massive problem, but at least I had the key to solving it. That village. That was the reason I forgot about all of the other orders!

"How could I have gotten them finished? Making an actual real-life village took up all of my time! I can't work more than twenty-four hours a day! That kind of service doesn't even exist!"

Look, I like (sexy) room service. It's kind of my thing. But instead, I was providing every other kind of service you could imagine in my room late at night as my side-job. Which I *don't* like!

"I wrote 'top priority' on those orders, you lazy wretch! All the women in town are waiting on their dresses, flared skirts, and blouses! And

I wrote ‘extra top priority’ on the mushroom lunches I ordered—ughhh!”

“Don’t! Order your lunch from me! Every day! There are plenty of restaurants in town! You write ‘urgent’ on all of your orders! If everything is urgent, nothing is! What makes your lunches so urgent anyway?”

The general store lady had ordered a massive amount of women’s clothing from me. They were all ordinary long dresses, skirts, and blouses. If they had been low-cut dresses, fishnet tights, and miniskirts, I would’ve made them right away! And then I would’ve sat down in the middle of the street to see the fruits of my labor, weeping and bowing for joy!

“Look, the long skirts didn’t exactly get me fired up… I didn’t feel *motivated* by them, got it? Couldn’t I add a little slit, maybe about a meter long—”

“One meter?! That’s more slit than dress!”

“They’re easy to move around in?”

“If you moved at all you’d reveal everything!”

I see, I was outmaneuvered by all the middle-aged women in the city. It was a perfect encirclement, cutting off all avenues of escape. Their power couldn’t be measured with stats. This was on a similar scale to the power of the girls when faced with one of my bargain sales. *Terrifying auntie might!* Aunties are just as unstoppable in fantasy worlds!

I went back to the textile mill and started up production. If I showed them a finished product, that would speed things along, and when I made them in a factory, it lowered the price so that the aunties could buy all the dresses they wanted. I drew the paper patterns, cut the fabric accordingly, and started sewing right away—with my Magic Hands, of course. Folks in this town preferred simple and minimalist designs, so they were quick and easy to produce. The customers were all middle-aged women, after all.

Back in the garment factory workshop, I gathered some employees and started coaching them through the process. I provided polite, precise, and pleasant instructions. The employees were actually young women here, see! This was my one chance to raise my approval ratings from the level of elementary particles to the level of atoms. I provided the most cordial, hands-off instruction I could manage.

“That’s not quite it, don’t stab. Pull the needle through, y’know? Yes, through the cloth. You can’t pull the thread like that. That’s right, you need to swoop it around, through the garden path, and *pull* it tight to match the other threads. No, that’s too loose, y’know? It won’t pucker and come undone if you do it like I showed you. Show the thread some respect! There you go, exactly like that! Once the thread and fabric have become one, job done. That’s really good, that’ll make a great outfit once it’s finished.”

Instructing beautiful girls was a lot of fun. I had always wanted to become a librarian so that I could read books all day, but teaching beautiful girls all day would be pretty great.

Finally, I was able to deliver the aunties their beloved products. The younger girls seemed lonely, though. I gave all of the workers an employee discount, which made the clothes even more affordable for them—a discount that increased the quality and quantity of their output, which served as a nice bonus. Obviously, they could increase their output with more technology, but that’s why girls from poor families had gathered to work here. I’d love to work here myself. Why couldn’t I get hired at my own garment factory?

I also kept up the production with Magic Hands and Holding while I instructed the girls, so the rest would become surplus stock. If I made too much, the factory would have less work to do, so I should probably make more storage space. *Forget the aunties, stick with the babes!* I wouldn’t dare say it out loud, but that was my new plan! I’d have to keep up the tentacular tutelage while ensuring no errant tentacles trespassed into treacherous territory…

“This completes the order, and we’ve got plenty of stock, too. Speaking of which, since when were we selling so many clothes? Did a clan of nudists attack? I wonder where that clan is. In fact, I kind of need to find them, and that’s an urgent order.”

“They don’t exist!” snapped the general store lady. “Don’t bring nudists into this country. And why the hell would nudists buy clothes? Ooh, but if they did, just think of the profits…but they probably don’t have wallets…and they don’t exist in the first place!”

According to the general store lady, they weren’t coming. She went back to her store, laden with bundles of clothes, and she didn’t forget her

bento. She'd sooner have forgotten the clothes!

Time to take a break, perhaps? I knew the bucket factory didn't need any instruction. Only dudes worked there. Same went for the blacksmith. There was no happiness to be found for me there. I was bored again, so maybe time to make some equipment and dinner…but wasn't I not supposed to be doing this on my day off?

"The only thing I'd like to be doing right now is a certain Miss Armor Rep, which is too bad for me. Do you feel me, good sir? I swear it! And she's not back yet, so there's no doing to be done, which leaves me nothing to do. What's a teenage boy to do? I mean, there are certain things that teenage boys simply must do… Ugh, I want to do *things*!"

I had something I wanted to do, but there was nothing to do, so I went back to the forge, borrowed some space, and started smithing. I practiced on some weapons for the Royal Girl and the Meri family. They had the biggest targets on their backs, after all, and the Meris had already been attacked before. No doubt the enemy wanted to rain on their merry murder parade and murk up their merriment. And the princess was in a bad position. I said I was practicing, but I did use top-quality materials and so I ended up with incredibly valuable and amazing items featuring the best enchantments.

"Old man, why are you hammering your swords? You could just use Alchemy to mass-produce them! Is your beard getting in the way? Or is it your baldness? Do you want a hair transplant—cheeks to scalp?"

"Don't move my hair around! It's impossible to mass-produce with Alchemy. Everyone knows that. You gotta fuse the spellstones and effects to the metal, and purify the metal, too. At that point it's faster just to forge by hand, plus the end product ends up better. Your Alchemy isn't normal, boy, no alchemist can do what you do. And don't say a word about my precious beard…"

I'd better ask the nerds about how to manufacture swords. If he could use Alchemy to make 'em, this old dude would make some awesome swords, no doubt about it. But if the nerds attempted it, they'd probably end up with a steamboat again. Out of sheer frustration I'd have them shipped out on that boat. *Next time I'll make a torpedo.*

“Uhm, look, I’m not quite exactly satisfied with the situation, it’s like, uhhh, kind of different, you know? I mean, I don’t know anything about this, but I just kind of know that this is wrong.”

What was the problem? I had no knowledge about smithing, but I had definitely seen stuff and read about it before. I knew that something wasn’t quite right.

“I can’t understand a word you’re saying. I’m saying that *you’re* the only person in this entire world that can make swords like that. If any blacksmith came up with stuff like that, they’d be the most famous smith in the world, forget about mass-producing that kind of weapon.”

I could mass-produce weapons with Alchemy, but I couldn’t improve their quality. I could take them one at a time and give them enchantments and power-up them up with mithril, which would make them like top-class dungeon items, but taking dungeon items and powering *them* up with mithril made even better weapons. I didn’t get it, but at least I strengthened my classmates’ equipment. *But the execution’s not quite there,* I thought.

I decided to try forging the sword properly from the start. After all, this was an important task. I couldn’t make equipment for all thirty of my classmates like this, but if I could figure out mass-production, I’d raise everyone’s base strength. I should be able to get this into an assembly line.

My classmates were about to bring back vast wealth from the dungeon, after all. Nobody was as rich as my classmates after a dungeon raid. *I’m gonna bill them for all they’re worth!*

DAY 57

EVENING

If you can't adapt, that just means you're old.

OMUI CITY

INTERLUDE: DUKE'S PALACE

BEFORE ME LAY EQUIPMENT beyond compare. It was beyond even what the mightiest lords of the kingdom had. He had simply given us these treasures, no strings attached.

"And now I have accepted even more from him… In that case, at least I shall wear his sword and armor with pride! And continue to use his massage cha-a-a-air! Ahh. This sword and armor from that boy, it is worthy of becoming a treasure of this duchy. I must raise a family that will not put this sword to shame. Perhaps we can update the family motto: 'Futz around and find out (when you get stabbed with this sword)'. Yes, that would do nicely."

I could ask for nothing more than a peaceful, prosperous, and happy populace. I had to admit, however, this sword and this armor would let me protect this precious happiness.

"I received an enchanted dress of my own," said Merielle. "Mother got one, as well. How did he get my measurements? The dress fits me a little too perfectly."

The boy gave weapons and armor to our family. It was his way of thanking us for the mining rights, or so he said. Why did he feel like he needed to thank us? He discovered those iron lodes, dug those tunnels, and mined the ore by himself. He could've done it without telling anyone and maintained a complete monopoly. Instead, he gave us all the information and mined years' worth of iron for our benefit. He even stored it for us. He simply said that it was in the way.

After receiving a bounty of iron the likes of which our resource-poor frontier had never seen, the whole city was in uproar. New buildings and

shops sprung up along the streets, selling tools.

Items that we couldn't even afford before now overflowed the streets of Omui—they spilled forth like a river. Every day when I walked outside, it still brought tears to my eyes. I could not fully accept the miracle before us. I vowed to never take a peaceful, prosperous domain with smiling children for granted. How could I? My ancestors could never have dreamed of this sight. I would never get used to it.

And now, the blacksmith was picking up the pace, too. The boy pulverized the poverty of Omui and built up our defenses. This blacksmith of ours had never been given a break in his life, and at last, now he could *smith*. His furnace burned as bright as the fires in his heart—a man whom nobody else could save, saved by that one boy. We barely had scrap metal, let alone proper iron, and now he was pumping out weapons made with precious silver to fight the monsters of this land. He made spears and arrows out of the timber we could hardly procure before. He learned to smith under the tutelage of the best smith in the capital, where he was acclaimed as a natural genius, and now, he could exercise his craft by producing weapons for the frontier.

I barely used to be able to provide him scrap iron, but he still went on scrounging together weapons for the protection of the frontier. At last, he had been rewarded. He would smith until he collapsed, that I knew. Now he could use iron of the finest quality either of us had ever seen in our lives. The boy provided the iron and timber and charcoal in droves.

"Once you profit, you'll get twice as much back," the boy had said, as he dropped off such treasures. I knew now that the man was smithing like he never had before, although it would never be possible to pay that boy back in double. Because he had received his life's calling—to forge with his own arm. He was a blacksmith again. The best smith in all the land. And now he was on the road to surpass even that; if he was ever going to pay the boy back double, he'd need to be a lot better than the best.

He hid his shame, bowed his head. And then, he started on the first proper commission he had ever received. At the time, he said this to me: "Up until today, I had never been able to make a true weapon, and instead, made tools that sent men to their deaths. So, from this day on, I swear that my weapons and armor will *save* lives." He apologized and bowed deeply.

But the men who died fighting with those weapons would have thanked him for supplying them anything at all. Still, I could tell the man cursed himself. He could not make proper weapons, proper armor—that was why he called his shop an armory and not a true blacksmith. He had lost even the honor of his true calling, his real name.

Even now, the iron production proceeded even faster than our expectations. We had dug five times the amount we commissioned. This wasn't just "ahead of schedule." And despite our measly commission rate, the boy gave us all of that iron "as thanks for the mining rights." With such a prize, of course we must protect the people with everything we had. With such incredible weapons, we could take on the world.

And the best blacksmith in the kingdom was making weapons for our army. Luxurious ones, at that. Now, if our soldiers did not defend the people of this land, I would punish them with my own hands. After all the blessings we had received, I would not permit even a moment of rest! Training, preparations, assault!

"Father! Haruka-san said that you should stay put and listen to your advisors. Why are you already wearing your battle attire? If you leave right now, our army will reach the capital before the royal army attacks. That's not negotiations, that's a preemptive attack! That wouldn't protect our people, that would send them right into the enemy's blades! The king would be furious with you! Are you serious?!"

I was incredibly serious. Why did everyone always tell me to listen to my advisors*? I'm the duke!* I knew that my advisors would oppose a preemptive strike.

"My long-cherished desire is to die for the sake of the frontier," I said. "All of my forefathers have done the same. Do not order me to hold on to my life—that is not the way of our people! Our ancestors were not even permitted to dream of a world like the one we have today, where the people of the frontier live in peace and prosperity! I must do something!"

I swore to not die until I could repay these blessings, but they only increased exponentially day after day. At this point, I couldn't repay them—I could barely keep track of them! And the boy didn't even give me the chance to thank him. Every time I did, he ran away, babbling nonsense.

“He gave us this armor to prevent us from dying. So don’t just charge in blindly!” Merielle begged me.

We were shameless recipients of countless blessings. We were all living a happiness beyond our imagination.

“He even gave me, an enemy, an incredible suit of armor,” Princess Shalliceres said. Lowering her voice, she continued, “And a dress with a plunging neckline. Unnecessarily revealing!”

“Of course he did.”

“Do you know why that boy…” Princess Shalliceres corrected herself, “Why Haruka-sama is so determined to protect the people of the frontier? Also, why do you change the way you speak whenever you meet him? Can he possibly be so powerful at such a low level?”

Even the princess had received a sword and armor as “apologies for breaking your old stuff.” I had never heard of anyone apologizing for destroying their enemies’ equipment before, so it made sense that she was confused.

“He was angry that you tried to sacrifice your life, milady, though he recognized that you acted out of a desire to protect both the frontier and the kingdom. That is why he gave you a sword and armor. As for the dress…it’s his hobby? That’s the only explanation. While we may be of aristocratic birth, that boy doesn’t care. The dignity and convictions of royals have no meaning to him. I recommend speaking to him casually, as he has never recognized any of my own expressions of gratitude even once. But all we can do is thank him—as much as he hates it, as much as he runs, that is the best we can do.”

The princess had crossed swords with him, but she did not see how deep it went. She saw only a glimpse of just how terrifying he truly was.

“And yes—he is strong. Based on his level and stats, he should be a weakling, that much is true. He would be but a fledgling adventurer. When he first came here, he had the stats of an average villager. They are still low. And yet he is strong. Despite his weakness, he felled an orc king, numerous dungeon bosses, and cleared out the monster forest for us. His strength cannot be measured. Strength, after all, is about results—about defeating your enemy and surviving. No matter how high your level is, if you are

killed in battle, that cannot be called strength. That boy has killed and survived. Thus, he is strong."

Strength had no meaning. Strength had no rituals. It was only to win, to kill, to survive. There was no strength beyond those realities. That is what the rulers of Omui all learned.

Still, no one could truly understand how terrifying that boy was. To win in spite of his weakness, to kill, to live as if it were totally ordinary… That in itself was a terrifying strength. And the ignorant fools of the kingdom did not understand that, hence their reckless attempt to start a war. They did not understand just how foolish they were.

Foolishness that did not comprehend strength. And terror. The terror of seeing the impossible made a reality.

DAY 57

NIGHT

If you raise the stakes and change your perspective, you're just gonna get ripped off.

INTERLUDE: THE WHITE LOSER INN

ANGELICA BEAMED. *She must've been so worried.* When she came back to the room, she found Haruka-kun sleeping like a baby. After he was up all night building a village, it only followed that he would be exhausted.

He rarely slept. And even when he did, he slept lightly. What little sleep he got seemed to be plagued by nightmares. But now, he slept soundly. He went to the ruined village, rebuilt it, made a monument, and heard the gratitude of the surviving villagers.

Haruka-kun feared gratitude, but this morning, he grew up just a little bit. He wasn't wearing a fake smile. He looked a little sad, as always, but the emotion was expressed clearly on his face. And he hadn't given up, or forgotten, or gotten over it. He had finally managed to strike a balance in his heart. He admitted his sadness, but looked straight ahead in spite of it.

I hadn't seen Haruka-kun's face look like that in ages. He'd matured the tiniest bit. Well, he may have been rushing through all sorts of adult growing-up, the kind that you could hardly describe as tiny, night after night after night, but—I could tell he had grown up a little bit from the smile on his face this morning.

The girls in our class always resented the boys. They could be stupid, like kids, mess around and be teenagers, be meatheads, be nerds, get upset, go crazy—we envied them that. The only time we let loose was when we freaked out over additional orders or went rampaging through a bargain sale. Those were the only outlets we had to demonstrate our values. Those were the only times we could smile.

The girls all admitted that they were surprised to see such a mature smile on his face this morning. It was a relief. And a little exciting.

I hadn't seen it in ages. Ages and ages. Even Angelica-san, who was with Haruka-kun all the time, was happier than normal. She got to see his happy sleeping face for the first time, I bet. I knew she had never seen it before.

"I want to see what he looks like when he's asleep!"

"No," I said, "I don't want him to wake up from people gawking at him. Of course not!"

"So lame."

"The answer is no!"

But I knew he was still sad, that he still felt guilty. That was just who he was. He would never forget that tragedy. He probably still thought it was his own fault. No one could save him from that.

He was the type of person who suffered endlessly from things that weren't anybody's fault. If anyone could save him, it'd be the kind of person who could rescue people from worthless platitudes: "It was unfortunate." "Nobody's to blame." He was out of reach to us.

Jiggle jiggle.

"Hey, get back here, Slimey!"

Boing boing!

Slimey seemed upset that Haruka-kun didn't play with him this evening. What a spoiled little blob.

The general store lady could understand the concept of compromise. What it meant to not be able to save other people. To have to reach a compromise in your heart. To be able to draw the line—she knew.

After all the cyclical suffering she went through, she knew how he felt. She pushed him away because of it, because she knew there was no truly saving others. But even if they couldn't save everyone, they itched to save as many people as they could. That's where the sadness came from. That's why he seemed older. And stronger. His stats were unchanged, but he was definitely stronger. Honed by his feelings.

Haruka-kun had reached a compromise now. He knew that he couldn't save everyone. He once lamented that he only knew how to kill.

But now, he accepted that killing monsters helped people. That too, was a little bit of growth.

"He did seem more determined," Vice Rep A commented.

"His smile was so sad, though."

"But that dinner… *Pork cutlet*…"

"That's right!"

No one wanted to wake him up. We were all expecting big things, so we didn't eat the meal that the inn prepared for us. Unfortunately, Haruka-kun said that creating authentic tonkatsu sauce was impossible in this world.

"Good morning, or should I say, welcome back? All right! Should I make dinner, or are y'all gonna take baths? Maybe you'd like to hunt some nerds?"

"Dinner!" everyone cheered.

"You said that you'd make tonkatsu and I've been dreaming of it all day!"

"Please don't hunt us!" the nerds cried.

I thought he was sleeping so soundly that even Presence Detection wouldn't wake him up. But by the time he came down the steps with a blank expression, he was already using Magic Entanglement and Manipulation. Total battle readiness!

"Tonkatsu!!"

With the pork cutlets prepared and breaded ahead of time, they floated into the air and traced complex spirograph patterns around him, sizzling in midair. Our stomachs growled as the scent of fried cutlets wafted through the air.

"Just hearing it fry—I know it's delicious!"

"The sound and smell are perfect together!"

Plates floated out of his item bag and danced across the room, scooping up servings as his Magic Hands' high-speed wire cutter shredded cabbage. With the addition of sauce, they were complete, and floated to the tables. Freshly cooked rice followed soon after, and bowls of mushroom

soup appeared next. It was too perfect, and it took less than three minutes. The sounds and the smells made the meal delicious before I'd even taken my first bite. The short wait felt like an eternity. I wanted to help, but I couldn't, so I just had to wait, but the time dragged on and on… Nobody could resist the sizzle of pork cutlets!

"It's ready! Dinner's served, y'know? There's enough for seconds! Buy two for the price of two! Eight-hundred ele per meal!"

"Let's eat!"

"I'll get seconds, hurry up!"

"Bon appétit!"

"I'd like to reserve seconds, please?"

"This *rules*, dude!"

The dining hall was full of munching and crunching happiness, reviving another one of our lost memories. He wanted us to have everything! He truly could bring anything and everything back from Japan, even impossible experiences like this. After all, he was the greediest of us all—that's why I knew he'd never give up.

"It's so good!" One of the girls wept with joy.

"Tastes just like home!"

Though we lost everything when we were dragged into this world, we got another thing back. *Re:Zero – Eating Tonkatsu in Another World!*

"I think this might be better than tonkatsu from back home?"

"This mystery meat tastes just like pork, I'm obsessed. Do you reckon it had claws and fangs?"

Haruka-kun scolded Kakizaki-kun and his friends for getting seconds while they were still eating their first portions. The girls hungrily eyed the extra portions, too. *Don't forget to leave one for Haruka-kun, got it? He'll get his revenge by bankrupting us again! And leave extra portions for me, too! There should be enough for three per person!*

"Seconds, please!" everyone shouted.

It was a trap! Why did Haruka-kun whip out grated daikon after I'd had two extra helpings? *It costs extra?!* Such a cunning plan, and I fell for

it!

He even made dessert! A variety of fruit mousses?! My favorite, and he prepared four different flavors! *Before we take our bath, we need to train and exercise!* I'd lost count of how many calories I consumed. *Time to enroll in Captain Angelica's Bootcamp. Do your worst!*

DAY 57

NIGHT

Their heads were full of hot air before, but now it's pure vacuum.

THE WHITE LOSER INN

EVERYONE MADE IT to the 49th floor of the dungeon without a problem. Miss Armor Rep and Slimey said everyone passed, and that it was one easy, dominating victory after another. Sounded like a worthy 'pass' to me. But now over half of the class had gotten stuck at level 99. Leveling up to 100 really was on a different level, pun intended. Was the only option to have them handle a dungeon boss battle themselves? The guild didn't know anything about it, so our only option was to try it out. They had just started up another round of training. Like any other day, there was always more training to do. The girls were apparently concerned about calories. If so, why did they devour every last bit of fruit mousse that I spent the last two weeks preparing? I made so much money.

I came up with a brilliant scheme where I would allow them to pay for clothes with dungeon loot. Then, I would upgrade it with mithril and sell it back to them. They could keep paying with more loot, making this a perpetual profit machine! *I'm a genius!* So, why was I still so broke? Anyway, back to applying mithril.

"I'll start the bargain sale when they finish their bath… Just equipment today."

If I included any accessories or clothes, they would focus solely on those. Since the normal clothes had enchantments, they got some protection for their daily lives…but still, this was *way* too much focus on daily protection! If this kept up, they'd start raiding dungeons in their street clothes!

"Oh, I'll include a fashionable item bag," I decided.

Jiggle jiggle?

An item bag required both Alchemy and Void magic, so I hadn't been able to make one yet, but it turned out instructions were in the books whose titles I shall not name. If I gave them stylish designs, the girls would be happy to carry them around. I applied the same strategy to weapon design.

"I don't know why they won't just use plain leather bags. The mean girls apparently thought those were tacky… Compared to what, longswords?!"

With a little more research, I could even add Item Storage to clothes, which would solve several problems. Though that would only encourage the girls to wear their casual duds during dungeon raids! Who dresses for a picnic in a dungeon?!

"And magic defense for the exposed skin… This is almost too much!"

I had figured out how to magically increase physical defense with an enchantment. *Bikini armor…is now possible!* That would have a devastating effect on a teenage boy's combat capabilities! *I mean, have you ever met a teenage boy? No chance.*

"Fuuuuhh."

I took care of what I needed to do, but maybe I did a bit too much. Doing too much might be the very cardinal sin of the teenage boy, so to speak. Because by the time I finished the leotards I realized I also kind of made skimpy cheongsam dresses, too?

"We successfully made gold and silver thread at the textile mill…and the next thing I knew I had gorgeous cheongsam… Eighteen types, too. What am I supposed to do with these?"

Eighteen battles with Miss Armor Rep would definitely annoy her. But I couldn't give up any of the designs! This was a problem. And when she put them on, I'd have even bigger problems!

"A mini cheongsam is pretty unorthodox, but it turned out… absolutely amazing!"

And that would mean Big Trouble in a Mini Size. But including the mini cheongsam, that was thirty battles? That would definitely take all night.

“I made a few prototypes, trying to figure out the final design, and I just ended up with a huge variety!”

The cheongsam would sell spectacularly, that was for sure, but if I had Miss Armor Rep try them on, would I ever escape this room? The fishnet tights were being kept confined to this inn, for example. If the girls started walking around outside with them on, it’d cause all sorts of problems.

“Miss Armor Rep would definitely show off the cheongsam, and then the secret would be out!”

She was a pretty immature eternal seventeen-year-old. I mean, she showed off her outfits to Slimey! And whenever she showed off her new outfits, I got lectures and orders in waves. Of course, I wanted to see everyone in the cheongsam. They would look like a dream come true. Twenty girls in flattering Chinese dresses would be extremely powerful—even dangerous. If the other guys saw the girls in those dresses, their minds, already as insubstantial as air, would dissipate completely into a vacuum!

“Sounds like a skill, Vacuum Slice or something. Worth acquiring?”

The mini dresses from before made them stand as mute as walls. *Maybe I could paint over them?*

“A careful screening, that’s it! I’ll narrow it down to sixteen cheongsams plus the leotards. I’m sure things won’t be easy for me, but a beautiful tomorrow awaits!”

Because tomorrow’s cheongsam samples were gonna be a certified cheongsam smash. These were merely prototypes.

“What happened? Why do I have eight leotards before me? I only made one color, black, but now there’s a white one, too… It looks real nice, though. I couldn’t decide which faction was best, black, or white! Not to mention pink and baby blue!”

When I looked in on their training session, I saw a brutal battle. Miss Armor Rep was cutting them apart left and right, dancing through the sky, whacking and bonking them. It looked like they were working on interpersonal combat training and experience. And a certain jiggling fellow was ready for the next round. Looked like they were combining aerobic and anaerobic exercises with swordplay, very effective. I thought it best not to

say anything about how much they ate. Their glares would be enough to destroy me! Just thinking it was enough to make several of them stare daggers at me!

"More than two hundred servings between thirty-one people, not forgetting about the fruit mousse dessert, and I still sold out! Slimey got his own separate bucket, so he can't be blamed, y'know?"

Boing boing!

The real culprits avoided looking at me, because one more round was coming for them! And their instructor looked especially determined to put on a show for this training session! *Yeah, they're screwed.*

They fell one after the next after a few bonks from Miss Armor Rep, stacked up like a pile of X-eyed logs. This was becoming an inn tradition. *Uh-oh.* I heard the jangle of platinum gauntlets. Miss Armor Rep was telling me to come spar with her.

"Don't tell me you had too much to eat too, Miss Armor Rep? Trying to burn more calories? Because we can definitely get some exercise in a bit later. Know what I mean?"

She responded with a slash. It was worth a try. *Nothing ventured, nothing gained, as the saying goes.*

"Could you not venture your sword so close to my body? I'm gonna lose some limbs! Or worse! I've got nothing to gain from dismemberment, y'know?"

I tried to squeeze my body into the gaps between her attacks, timing my evasion to the slicing of her blade, but the gaps were too small to fit between. I had nothing to gain from this venture beyond pure terror! *Please spare me!*

"That's right, training is important!" Vice Rep A called out.

"Doesn't Angelica-san seem *mega* happy right now?"

I had to move with complex, unpredictable movements. Miss Armor Rep kept up with me step by step in a sparkling, radiant dance, her gleaming sword like a florid phantom blossoming and bursting. I had to step through sword slashes in every direction, and all I had to repel her was a wooden stick—pretty peaceful of me to be honest—but if I missed a beat

that wooden stick would get cut right in half! I wreathed my stick in magic and continued to plunge forward, head-on, my mind speeding so fast that time slowed down to a crawl around me. Yet I still couldn't keep up. My stick was in dire straits!

I imbued my body with Teleport, Gravity Magic, and Instant Movement in a single step. She attacked like a crazed battle machine, and she could even dodge my finest blows. Through a combination of magic, stat enhancements, and skills, she delivered a storm of high-speed attacks. The entire world flashed with platinum… I was screwed.

"Ouch!"

I got bonked. But I would have my revenge. I had my leotards and cheongsams. There were still thirty-eight rematches!

"Nice job!"

"You did great!"

"Level really doesn't mean anything, huh."

The unconscious girls woke from their naps. Did they want to burn more calories? Little did they realize that my success in making mousse meant a future full of jelly. There would be no end to their crunches, count on it.

"Yeah, forget level. Endurance, defense, and offense matter way more. Speed doesn't mean anything compared to actual battle pace. If you die in a fantasy world, you die in real life, y'know?"

As one's level grew, they toughened up, learned more magic and skills, and so on; forget technique, magic was the awesome boss of the colossal lot. Martial arts were for people with weak, frail bodies, after all.

"But she still couldn't hit him with a real skill, not even a scratch?"

"What's the point of having level 99 Speed?"

"If she did hit me, I'd totally die!"

Even a scratch would kill me. You couldn't call a person like that strong. I had to dodge everything because I couldn't survive anything, including magic. Even my limit-breaking Luck couldn't protect me from

Miss Armor Rep. I knew that. Defense and offense were the only forms of real power.

"Exchanging blows will just blow me out the window, so of course I'm going to swoop, swivel, swindle, and swap?"

Endurance, defense, destructive force, level. Somehow, I had to be able to fight Miss Armor Rep head-on or I had no chance of winning, much less surviving. She was the real paragon of battle. What the hell was I supposed to do?

At least the starlet in question was feeling fantastic. Since she was only chaperoning, she must've been bored. So, she beat up her employer out of boredom…maybe Luck could bail me out one day. *Avenge me, Luck!* That'll refresh me!

I left to take a bath. If I didn't run a murderous, free-for-all bargain sale, I'd run out of funds for food and condiments, so I was getting uneasy. I needed to think about buying in bulk, too. I had soy sauce, so what about miso? It could be out there. Even kombu and dried bonito flakes could exist! I wanted to check out the kingdom and the surrounding countries, but there were still too many dungeons left, never mind the planned military moves. Oh yeah, and there was still a possibility that sexy female spies would kidnap me! I had to wait and see if that happened!

"I doubt whether Santa could deliver presents in this world, even if I was a good boy. Still, I wish for a visit from femme fatales. I am a good boy, aren't I?"

Though a good boy wouldn't have wished for sexy spies to kidnap him, I supposed. Well, whatever! At least my whole class had the minimum equipment they needed. Miss Armor Rep had already tried on five cheongsams and two leotards. She was about to wear the gorgeous, red cheongsam next, but I wasn't going to object to the white leotard either! And now, night was about to fall: a night full of events where middle-aged men were not invited.

"I've been trying to will this sexy female assassin thing into existence for ages but instead, I get an old dude?"

C'mon, that red cheongsam was next. The last thing I needed was this old dude.

DAY 57

LATE NIGHT

Old dudes came to the inn, but here's the real shocker: all of my classmates are actually old dudes!

THE WHITE LOSER INN

I DIDN'T WANT an old man dressed all in black in my bedroom. I had been working my ass off out here, raising event flags left and right for sexy female assassins, but this world betrayed me yet again! I would've preferred it if Slimey gobbled him down the moment he entered through the window. I doubted that he was appetizing, but maybe Slimey could then spit him out somewhere else. All of his accompanying assassins had died on their way in through the window because I had put up wire traps all across the other windows. *Of course you'd get cut apart trying to jump through that! That's just logical.*

"After everything I've gone through!" I roared. "They sent old dudes! How dare they!"

"Are you okay?!"

"What about you?"

"What happened?"

"No injuries?"

"Well, all the assassins are already dead."

"Yeah, same in my room."

Ten of them tried to infiltrate four separate rooms. But our defenses were solid as can be. The more aggressively they tried to force their way in, the more badly they were sliced. I poisoned the wires as well, so they all died instantly. Only one of them still lived, and he was on the verge of death. All of my classmates' Presence Sensing had picked up on what was happening, so everyone had their equipment on and weapons at the ready. The meatheads were throwing around enormous boomerangs indoors for

some reason, but I couldn't worry about them. Even whaling on them wouldn't wrap this up—this was a test of my ability to ignore them! *I'll show them! I've literally got other things to worry about!*

The surviving old dude had already been captured by Slimey and was well on his way to the duke's palace. The Duke would know what to do, and if he didn't, so what? I didn't want to deal with some old dude.

I let Class Rep handle the old dude transport. I headed over there myself and saw the watchfire burning and the soldiers already in formation. Things were already well in hand.

"Good evening? Well, forget that I just asked that as a question because it's really not a question. So an old man came to the inn, and believe it or not, all of the guys with him were at least middle-aged? I've been trying to get a female assassin this whole time. Why am I literally a magnet for old men? You're also an old dude! Seriously, I needed at least the assassin of all people to be a hot girl! Just let it end! Just let my agony cease!"

The advisor came and met me at the palace gate. Why was it so easy to pass through that gate? These guards let me through every time, and they didn't even ask for my name. What's the point of a gatekeeper anyways?

"We apologize for the inconvenience," the advisor said. "We resolved the incident with only a single injury sustained from a poison-coated sword, but thanks to your mushroom potion antidotes, the wound did not turn fatal. Without your ailment-resistant equipment, the soldier would have died before we had chance to administer aid."

"The enemy had almost no survivors," the Duke said, "but I suppose you won't care about that since they were mainly male."

No major damage to the frontier. I mean, I was pretty sure things would be fine, but I didn't know that the enemy soldiers wouldn't even be particularly strong. My question was how they got through the pseudo-dungeon? *Old dudes like that shouldn't have a chance!*

I was talking with the advisor when the Duke showed up, and then my classmates showed up with the old assassin man, and now Stalker Girl was here with info, too. She didn't exactly make it in time, but it sounded

like she knew exactly what happened. *What's with the shit-eating grin?! You're literally late!*

"They used balloon bats to invade from the sky," she said. "Assassins and spies. We've launched an investigation and capture mission, but please give us some time to finish. There are still some free agents out there—not a lot, but possibly as many as twenty or thirty. They should all be lightly armed."

Monsters that floated in the air like zeppelins, huh? I didn't expect some form of air travel. Stalker Girl said that those monsters were very rare, so they couldn't invade in numbers.

"Air…that's annoying."

"We need longbows…or maybe crossbows?"

We needed to kill them in an air battle. Hot air balloons made for easy targets. Slimey could float and I had Airwalk. I couldn't stay up there for long, but if we were talking about an all-out air offensive, that was my forte. I hadn't discovered a landing method yet, but as for crash-landings… you could call me the master at that. *Call me Crash King, now there's a title for me!*

"Shall we move over to the pseudo-dungeon's castle for the night? It'll be easy to shoot them all down from Murimuri Castle, plus it seems like something else is coming?"

Murimuri Castle had the pseudo-dungeon as its gatehouse, after all, so it was a guaranteed stronghold. I knew the general store had plenty of stock, plus her volume of orders was totally unfulfillable anyways, so I could just leave that be. Because if I didn't physically leave the inn, an order form was bound to chase me down! Maybe even to the next village over… *Don't think about it!*

Class Rep had wrapped it up with the old assassin dude and was coming back over to join us. *Huh? Why is she bowing?*

"Lord Omui, I'm terribly sorry for all the fuss. Assassins showed up at our inn, so we captured one and brought him to you. Did you already hear what happened? And if so, were you able to understand? You should find it much easier if you simply ask that Slime right there. Shall we get away from Haruka-kun?"

“No, no,” replied the duke, “you’ve done nothing wrong. We should be thanking you. As the Duke, I’d like to express gratitude on behalf of all of Omui.”

What was this strange, uncanny speech pattern from Mr. Meridad? Up until like three seconds ago he was asking under his breath to me about how the massage chair production was going and if I could make him one more. *Talk about code switching!* With that demeanor no one would even recognize him as the duke. He wore an ordinary soldier’s uniform, after all. His advisor was way better dressed!

“Our survey of the surroundings has been completed!”

“We have dispatched soldiers to the city.”

“Hm. Don’t let up until morning comes.”

“Yes sir!”

But why did they send such weakling assassins after us? Now it would be harder for the kingdom to actually do anything. Was it a diversion? With the duke here, did that mean their real objective was elsewhere?

“What happened to the Royal Girl and Merimeri-san?”

The most dangerous possible option was someone from the Meri family becoming a hostage, and then the princess, who was also a general of the kingdom army. They used the doddering, middle-aged assassins as distractions while pursuing their real targets. We had to figure out if they were trying to kill the Royal Girl or retrieve her—if they wanted her as a hostage, then we might be able to get her back. Even so, it might be safer to just let them capture her. Otherwise they might suspect that she betrayed them.

“They’re fully equipped inside the palace. Merielle places among our finest soldiers, and the princess is one of the mightiest knights in the entire kingdom. I don’t think we need to worry about them being attacked. They were accompanied by soldiers for extra security.”

I tried using Presence Sensing and Enemy Tracking. No response.

“I wanna go check on them, but if no one comes with me the Royal Girl will definitely start yelling that I’m a pervert, which would kind of

cause issues for all of us. Why are the nerds and meatheads raising their hands?! More guys is not the solution to a teenage girl screaming about perverts! That only makes things worse! I knew you guys were clueless, but at least try to hide it sometimes! Don't tell me you guys *want* to be called perverts!"

It's not that *I* wasn't looking forward to being around the Royal Girl, but at this point if I saw one more old dude, I would lose it. Every time I hoped for something, this world delivered old men instead… Anyone who experienced my life would break down and weep agonized tears. And if I rushed in and a middle-aged man started screaming and calling me a pervert, I would definitely scorch his scalp. I'd turn this palace into dust and ashes!

"Don't burn down my palace, please!"

Since the discussion wasn't going anywhere, Miss Armor Rep went over to check. Slimey was still on standby at the inn, just in case we looked likely to get caught by the enemy. I chose to run around with high-speed movement, giving the enemy an intentional opening to strike.

No one else was around. No response from Presence Sensing or Enemy Tracking. I was sure Stalker Girl had tried those skills. Area Analyze didn't reveal anything either. Maybe I was being overly cautious, or maybe the enemy was after something different altogether. We had Miss Armor Rep and my twenty-nine classmates at the palace, so that place was safe as can be. If their objective was the Royal Girl or Mr. Meridad, they didn't stand a chance. The queen of combos would protect them! Even with my open invitation, nobody came. Maybe my sex appeal was literally too low?! I was completely defenseless, and yet no one attacked me! Instead, I was just some weirdo running around at the brink of dawn!

I ended up pretty far away from the city. *Maybe I should head back now*. Still no response from Presence Sensing or Enemy Tracking. *I've seen that before,* I thought.

"…"

A sword emerged from my shadow. I tried to take it, but it wasn't all that good, as swords went.

It did have some skills attached, and selling it at the armory could result in some pocket change, which was always in short supply. But the hand that gave me the sword was stuck in the shadow, frozen. Was that my only present? I kept waiting for the next one, but the hand remained stuck in place.

"Uh, you got any more presents for me or what? If you've got one, we're kinda low on hammers and I could sell that for some good money. No rush, but hurry up! This is kind of a big deal, y'know?"

"…"

Still stuck. *No hammers, I guess.* Morning stars were super rare, so they'd fetch a great price… I was still waiting.

"Look, I'm not trying to force you. Swords are totally fine with me. How about just cash? Anything worth anything, to be honest. Whatever you've got, for real, okay?"

"…"

The only thing that came out of the shadow was a girl, and she didn't look happy to see me. Not a sexy female assassin; just one of the handmaidens of the Royal Girl. She wasn't a femme-fatale assassin babe, but at least she was a sexy maid spy/bodyguard. I lured her all the way back to my cave, but I'd get scolded if I took her inside, so that was that. She confessed everything before we could even begin the detailed, bubbly cross-examination. *I whipped out the soap and bubble bath mix for nothing!*

Her objective was to retrieve the Royal Girl. She hired assassins, used them as a diversion, and went to rescue the princess. The other spies were there to create an escape route.

"I would've just returned the Royal Girl to you if you asked."

"But you took Princess Shalliceres hostage! Is—is she safe? I was so worried when I heard you captured her—worried that some monster of a man would do unspeakably perverse things to her—why did you just look away? Look at me! What did you do to her?! What did you do to my princess? What happened to my princess, what did you to do?!"

"I-it's not what you think! She *called* me a creep, but she was only half-naked, and it wasn't sexual at all! You had nothing to worry about, no problem here, okay? And then I quickly gave her some clothes—an extremely low-cut dress—so I deny all accusations! She still had some tattered clothes clinging to her, so it was all on the up-and-up, y'know? I mean, I was scolded and lectured, but since when did that prove my guilt?"

We were on the verge of a very dangerous misunderstanding. A false accusation would be disastrous.

"You forced the princess to strip half-naked and you say you haven't done anything wrong? That's worse than wrong! Then you forced her to wear a revealing dress? You're the worst kind of creep! You'll be hanged for this!" She continued her rant for some time.

She was angry at me about the half-naked heave-ho, so she lectured me about the sexy dress. But I wasn't the one who did the heave-ho, and the sexy dress just happened to be the only clothing I brought with me. That dress had excellent defense buffs, too, although the offensive potential of its appearance was extraordinary… Did that mean she didn't like it? *It's so sexy, though.*

"I totally didn't do that on purpose. That dress may have been a bit much for her in terms of *firepower,* if you catch my drift. In my opinion, though, in terms of firepower, she didn't need any help! Her body is indubitably hot enough to melt steel, as befits a Royal Girl of her standing and grandeur. Verily."

"How rude can you possibly be? Speaking politely while objectifying her appearance?! How dare you!" The ranting continued, though it did not

bear repeating.

I was simply trying to show how respectful I was. I wanted to respect every part of her, as any other hot-blooded youth would. My Jupiter Eye unintentionally preserved every last detail, leaving nothing to the imagination. Maybe that skill ought to be renamed Naked Eye!

One fact trumped all others: this maid had a truly marvelous glare! I happily preserved that memory, too!

DAY 58

EARLY MORNING

A defensive V-formation is jiggle jiggle but defense in depth is bounce bounce?

THE WHITE LOSER INN

AFTER THAT, the princess and the maid had some sort of an emotional reunion. Whatever it was, it had nothing to do with me, so I left. I was definitely not involved. They'd definitely yell at me if I tried to join the hug.

They reunited in a deluge of hugs and whispers, so I ignored them and went home. It was something or other about something-lord doing something in the something-kingdom, before heading to do something for someone in someplace, somewhere, sometime. I didn't care so I ignored it!

Now the class was having a meeting. Between the day-offers and the dungeon raiders and the pseudo-dungeon reconnoiterers there were all sorts of things to decide, but I was the only one who had a cheongsam cheongseomaissance at the top of his agenda. Because a certain someone in a certain cheongsam had been waiting up for me last night.

"We still have four dungeon bosses left, and we failed the exam!"

"I'm so tired, I can't focus today. We all need to sleep."

"More importantly, I heard that the general store just imported cheongsams? Since when did this world have a China?"

"And we need to watch the skies or they might launch an aerial invasion, too?"

"Ughhh."

Jiggle jiggle.

We could definitely expect another invasion from the sky. But balloon bats were so rare that they couldn't come in large waves, and the frontier army was apprehending as many of them as possible. There should

no longer be any way for the kingdom to send soldiers by air—which meant that it was still a possibility. No place was totally safe anymore.

"We're going to hear about the state of affairs in the kingdom later, so I suppose we should spend our time defeating dungeons or training, right?"

"But still…those assassins tried to poison our food and kill us! How can you be so relaxed?"

"Well, it's up to Duke Omui, but they did give an apology. They just wanted to save Princess Shalliceres."

"They apologized? To Haruka-kun? Like that'll work."

"Don't tell me they had to *interact* with him! I feel sorry for them!"

The state of affairs in the kingdom was confusing, so it was hard to come up with a plan, especially considering how Mr. Meridad was on the verge of invading the capital and all sorts of fuss was going down. I left the palace. Some whatzitsname kingdom was in the middle of some smash-hit break-up thingamajig, and all the lords of wherever were in all different blah-di-dah factions, so no one knew who was on what side.

The populace supposedly supported the frontier. The tragedy of the frontier was known all across the kingdom, so the people were sympathetic toward the frontier folk who battled monsters every day. But in the midst of all that mess, there was one clear enemy—the church. And the whatchamacallit old god worshipped by that church. That old geezer in the white room was definitely an enemy! *Destroy him! That's all that matters!*

"I met the old man behind everything. No good person would ever worship someone like that! Let's set it all ablaze. Seven days of fire! Let's go!"

"What is wrong with your face?" Class Rep said. "I've never seen a sneer that hideous. That face would bring a demon king to tears. You could destroy the world with that grimace!"

"It's worse than evil, it represents pure ugliness."

"I know you're just muttering to yourself like always, but we're not going to destroy industrialized civilization in a mighty conflagration, okay?"

"Why does that even need to be said?"

So, I couldn't just annihilate the geezer and his disciples. In that case, the only remaining options were extermination, liquidation, obliteration, eradication, massacres, and purges. *They all sound like good choices.*

"I like all the options, but annihilation has the best ring to it."

"Are you even listening?!"

Those guys were the ones who forced war onto the duchy, and of course none of us wanted to sign up to go get strangled to death. *That's what war is: killing each other.* No matter the euphemisms, that's all it was. They couldn't just ignore the consequences. They started it, so they couldn't complain. If they did, I sure as hell wouldn't be listening.

"I'm telling you, the fastest way to end this is to destroy the church. Because that's the old dude's stuff, I mean, then we could just slaughter everyone and send them straight to that geezer's white room. They're obviously into old men. That's their kink, so I'm sure they'd be into that result, y'know?"

"It's not a kink, it's a religion!"

"Religions aren't about sex!"

What was wrong with anything I just said? Even Slimey was jiggling in agreement, so was I literally the only one out of bounds here? Why did they even ask Slimey for his opinion about battle formations? By the way, his response to defensive V-formation was jiggle-jiggle, but defense in depth was bounce-bounce.

It went to a vote. The result: rest until lunchtime and see what happens. Then, after lunch, battle one or two of the dungeon bosses. My request for a cheongsam battle rematch was declined, for some reason, so no chance of a few dungeon empress battles. I never had high hopes, but the events of this morning made way too big of an impression on everyone else, apparently. She even had the red cheongsam on.

Anyway, I sauntered over to the general store, passed by the armory, and dilly-dallied all over town. Up until recently, all the buildings were made of rough, gray stones, but now it was fashionable to whitewash the walls, so limestone was selling like crazy. It was actually a secret source of income for me; it had taken off after I finished the renovations to the

general store and armory. Buildings all over town were painting their walls white, brightening the local scenery.

One pristine white building stood out. After the money started circulating in the frontier, the first thing Mr. Meridad got to work on was an orphanage. He prioritized a place that the children of adventurers and refugee children could share. It was his atonement to the people who protected the frontier, and to the lives of those who fell. It was for the sake of the children's future. Why did Mr. Meridad go to the general store to buy an orphanage, and why did the general store lady send me that order, saying I should make a house? It was an enigmatic process indeed, but I built it nevertheless: a building styled like a pure-white chapel. It served as good advertising for my limestone, so the orphanage ended up being a cheap investment into big money. First, they ordered a house, then a village. I had to respect the general store lady.

Then, a soldier stopped by and told me there was trouble and that I should stop by the palace. *Didn't I just leave?*

"They want me back now? Why didn't they tell me they needed me before I left? The whole discussion was a bore, so I ditched it!"

"As soon as we noticed you left, we were sent out to find you!"

As for the specific issue at hand, it was the maid and the sword I gave her. Fortunately, no one was injured or killed besides a few old men, and that was only because they shouldn't have sent old assassins in the first place. But what did they need me for? I already sold her the sword, so that was taken care of. I'd spent all the money I sold it to her for, so all the evidence was gone! She paid a hefty price too, but I had already run out of money for inn fees, so I likely had another lecture in store for later today.

"Not my fault I imported a crap-ton of pickled veggies and tomatoes. Because if I had these…then I actually could've made tonkatsu sauce! Which means more ripping off is in store for me, woohoo!"

The price of sugar was rising, probably because of the trade embargo. I'd have to get Stalker Girl to smuggle some in for me.

"How many times do I have to tell you that I can't bring back food supplies while I'm trying to gather intel?" she cried.

“All right, I’ll head over there myself,” I sighed. “I was the one that took the sword from her, which I sold for a great price, so I ought to put up a defense for her…I guess.”

I went over to the duke’s palace. I hoped to get this over with by lunchtime. Mr. Meridad always droned on for ages, and kept interrupting the conversation to talk about the massage chairs. We’d just have to cut him out of the conversation and make him stand over in the corner. *Does that count as fantasy-world bullying?*

“Thanks, you made me happy—the maid, I mean, so I’d like to request a reduced sentence. It was just one little sword, y’know? I’d put in a full appeal if she had given me six, but I already spent the money. So, since this has nothing to do with me, I’ll go.”

It had nothing to do with me either way. The only people who got hurt were soldiers, so I really didn’t understand why they had to summon me.

“She tried to assassinate you, and you say that it has nothing to do with you?” exclaimed Mr. Meridad. “And I promise, I’m going to save the massage chair talk for later!”

The problem, according to Mr. Meridad, was the attempted assassination. I’d be happy to raise some funds for window repair, and I’d already fixed them anyway, so that fund would be to pay me for my work. Maybe I could use that to pay my overdue bills at the inn!

“H-he’s not listening?!”

“I knew we should’ve called in Class Rep as his interpreter.”

Why did I get the sense we were talking about different things? Mr. Meridad saw the problem, but the enemy was the royal family, not the maid. What was the point in complaining to her? She worked for the royals, so she deserved a thumping. Did she do anything else? Did she shout, “woohoo, assassination,” to the high hills? In that case, I *would* kill her.

“No, the king…well, suppose it’s all a misunderstanding, ignoring the poison-coated sword, and the fact that she tried to stab me—she still committed a crime! Even if loyalty was her primary motivation, we cannot let her off after attempted assassination!”

“What? She tried to stab you? No wonder you’ve got your panties in a twist! I mean, I’d get pissed about that, but *I* didn’t do anything wrong and you’re mad at *me*, so maybe you should apologize instead?” I said. “See, the thing about me is that I didn’t do anything wrong. It’s kind of my thing. I say it eighty times per day yet it has no effect. I wonder why that is? Jeez!”

“Gaaaaah!”

Huh? What was happening? *Gaaah…god? No, that dude sucked.*

“Guys, what the what in the world of whattintheheck is going on? Gah is god, and that dude’s up in heaven, but when you say up, do you mean upstairs? Like where you-know-who is getting changed…? Ooh, you know what, I just remembered something so I’m actually going to take a quick peek upstairs, gotta go, real fast, you know—”

“Haruka-kun, stop. *You* were the one who got stabbed by a poisoned sword, but you seem to have no memory of it. She came out of the shadows and stabbed you.”

Someone was stabbed with an evil poisoned blade? Who?

“Well, if you’re talking about the dark sword, I happily accepted it. It didn’t sell for much, but don’t worry, I got it. You can’t have it. Not anymore?”

“Did that sword not have the skill Supremacy? I doubt that she would simply give it to you.”

“No, that’s what happened! She totally handed it to me, so it was in my possession. And I didn’t realize I was gonna have to hold on to it for y’all, so I sold it right away.”

“…”

Sometimes the stupidity of my fellow man astounded me. She gave it to me, and it became mine. When someone reached out to give something to you, that means it’s yours, obviously. What was Mr. Meridad going on about? I wished more people in this world had basic common sense.

The Royal Girl, who had been chewing her lip, clutching her fists, and trembling in silence with teary eyes, finally opened her mouth. Unfortunately, she was not wearing the sexy dress—an absolutely travesty.

“H-Haruka-sama. Are you saying that she did not attempt to stab you? As a member of the enemy conspirators, I have no right to say this, but are you truly going to let it pass? A deed of such magnitude? Are you truly going to forgive Ceres, my precious maid?!”

“Look, I don’t know what you’re saying with this ‘are you saying that she did not.’ Because it wasn’t like that, and anyway, I sold it! The sword was mine, but I sold it, so it’s gone. Now it’s one of the beard dude’s premium products, okay?”

Well, at least we were on the same page now. The language here had to be weird; that was the only way such a simple misunderstanding could get so out of hand.

“My blunder is…forgiven?” asked the maid.

“To be honest, I think you’re the victim of…theft?”

With that cleared up, the maid broke into tears, but for some reason she wasn’t in a maid outfit anymore; instead she was wearing the sexy dress I gave the Royal Girl. I barely recognized her at first. With all the openings and slits everywhere, it was a truly marvelous design! Outrageous! I needed to get the designer in here and order one for Miss Armor Rep on the double… Wait, I was the designer! *I’ve got some quick crafting to do once I get back.*

“I think we do need an interpreter.”

“But such a horrible deed…”

“It was…it was an assassination attempt!”

The skintight dress left the shoulders, neck, and arms bare. Indeed, the neckline plunged all the way to the navel, revealing pale white decolletage, with her breasts emphasized by hidden bust support. It was so audacious and enchanting!

“I don’t think he’s listening to a word we’re saying.”

“I suppose no one suffered in the end,” Mr. Meridad grunted.

The dress also had a slit going all the way up to the hips, edged with white, allowing an occasional beguiling glimpse of thighs wrapped in fishnet tights. Whenever she moved, the slit would reveal a tantalizing glimpse of her gorgeous legs! Whoa, mama! Just a few steps of that slit

moving around was enough to take me to a very dangerous place! Those glimpses of her long, white legs were ridiculously hot. The material was sheer enough to reveal hints of her womanly figure—it was scandalous! Each step revealed a glimpse of inner thigh, an invitation that sent my heart racing! I had to go back and make another one at once! *I wanna make one! No, several!*

"Thank you so much for your mercy and compassion," said the Maid Girl. "I heard from the princess that you have been so kind to pardon my foolhardy actions…but you still half-naked heave-hoed the princess, did you not? And what is with this ridiculously revealing dress?! Wearing this is more humiliating than being naked! It doesn't try to hide, it actively showcases what should be covered! There's no dress here, this is trying to turn me into a show, I can't so much as look at anyone! And you're *staring* at me, you swine! You dared try to make the princess put on such a vile thing?! I have no words! This is a crime beyond redemption, you hear me? You should be executed! We'll have your head mounted on a pike!"
The rest of her rant was omitted in the interest of time.

But this dress fit the maid all too well. Her body must not have differed from the Royal Girl's by more than a centimeter. They were practically body doubles. I knew this because all the right parts were still concealed! If their bodies were even the tiniest bit different, all of those precious parts would have been on full display. It literally fit her perfectly!

It went without saying that I perfectly preserved the image of her glaring at me in the dress in my memory. That was a treasure, something to pass on to future generations of teenage boys who would make great use of it. *Can't I print this out somehow?*

DAY 58

MORNING

I'm a bit concerned about where the hell this is going.

OMUI CITY

ROYAL GIRL AND MAID GIRL were childhood friends. They reunited in an outburst of tears as they clung tightly to one another. I would have loved to join in with the clinging, but someone would probably get mad at me. I mean, I didn't even say it out loud and I got skewered in the back by a glare from Miss Armor Rep.

"C-can you read my mind or something?!"

"Thank you so much. I'll never forget what you've done for me."

"You were literally muttering aloud!"

Jiggle jiggle.

"Are you for real?"

"I can assure you that I was not listening, and it is already forgotten."

"For real for real?!"

Owing to the maid's low social status, she couldn't take extenuating circumstances into account when dealing with a mistake, so she would be sent straight to the gallows if she failed. That meant she risked her life to save her childhood friend. That was how much she loved her. She was biting her lip earlier because she was prepared to throw herself to her death. I mean, I love a little lip-biting, but I didn't want to see girls cry, either. Well, if it had to do with something sexual, that was kind of my thing, but I was usually the one crying the next day after getting the shit beaten out of me. Then I sought vengeance the next night! And so on. An endless cycle of sex revenge!

"But I'm not like an alpha or a lowbie or anything, really," I said.

"What?"

“I mean, I’m not a villager or an adventurer. I’m technically unemployed? So, I kind of have no right to punish you?”

My social position was nonexistent. It would be more sinister if an unemployed shut-in had the right to decide the fate of Maid Girl, anyhow. Because that would only result in sexy stuff? Not that I would dislike that, nay, from the very bottom of my heart I would love that. I mean, if she was willing to throw away her life then she wouldn’t mind if her punishment ended up being traded for an order of one more sexy double dress on the double. Oh yes, that’s how far I’d go! I just didn’t like it when people cried around me. I mean, given the stakes, my idea of punishment would make her happier than the alternative!

Let’s just keep it our little secret that the view from behind Maid Girl was *extremely* hot as she cried and hugged Royal Girl. The dress bared her entire back, and the rest of it clung to her body, perfectly outlining the curve of her butt; below that, a deep slit ran all the way down her thighs and legs. *Thanks for the view!*

“Everyone else is intentionally diverting their eyes, so can you please not blatantly stare?”

Well, now the two of them seemed to be enjoying each other, so I went over to Mr. Meridad when he waved at me, and he rewarded my careful attention with a vicious two-handed punching wave. Ouch. Kind of aggressive for a duke. Whatever, I left the duke’s palace and walked around. There were more food stalls. Stores, too. Plenty of shopping. It felt like a totally different city with so many people out and about.

One group of crazed shoppers stood out: the girl meatheads. As in, the sports girls, who appeared to be laying siege to the city’s food stands. They’d had breakfast at the inn this morning, so I supposed this was lunch for them. But were those croquettes in their hands? Looked like they went through another boot camp today. The drill sergeant was shaking her head at their side.

“Oh, hey Haruka-kun. Are you heading back to the inn?”

“Well, it’s about lunchtime, right? Why are you guys eating before lunch? Are you trying to become giant meathead girls and merge into a single meat wad? Then fight over musical tastes and split up for solo

adventures? You'll just get fat, y'know? And start jiggling like jelly, ooh yeah, in all sorts of directions, yeah yeah!"

"Shut the hell up! You don't say that to girls!"

"And what's with the singing? We'll just cover ourselves in candy wrappers if we turn into jellies!"

We returned to the inn in a raucous uproar, and found the mean girls up to something or other along the way. They were with some local girls.

"Yo, mean girls? Mean girls and Queen Bee! I'm a bit worried y'all are gonna start biting the locals, and that means prison… Beats me why."

"Why the hell would you think that? And do you seriously expect us to believe that you still don't remember our names?"

"Calling us mean girls in the middle of town, seriously!"

"Since when did I evolve into a Queen Bee? I'm not a monster! I don't evolve!"

It was my first time in a while getting yelled at by the mean girls. Their glares were bad, but the risk of getting my head bitten off was worse. I mean, my brain's in there!

"No, you see, Shimazaki-chan is just giving fashion lessons to the other girls in town!"

"Yeah, she's the fantasy world fashion queen!"

"Oh no, a mean-girl monster queen *and* a mean-girl delinquent boss?!"

"Cut the 'mean girl' crap!"

"But you're fine with the 'boss' part?!"

I did hear from the general store lady that the mean girls wore the best-selling clothes in town. The general store lady had started getting fashion catalogues made, and the mean girls were the lovely models. But their demands were way too specific. They sent their clothes back if they were even an inch off. Apparently, it wasn't about the length or width, but the overall balance? I was more concerned about their mental balance. I mean, the fashion balance was fine. We'd just have to keep it a secret that their true personal brand was the completely unbalanced "Head Bitten Off

By The Delightful Sailor Mean Girls.” Because I’d get bitten if they heard that from me! Oh, and glared at.

“And don’t forget to look at yourself in the mirror from a distance,” one of the mean girls told the local girls.

“Yeah, the silhouette is important.”

“Okay! Thank you so much!” the local girls shouted.

“Thank you!”

“I’ll try my best!”

Queen Bee was wearing a strap dress and white capris with blue mules. A breezy, innocent mean girl? Kinda clashes, doesn’t it? I mean, who is she and where is she going? It did certainly attract attention, and it was a striking outfit without seeming too overwrought. Effortless beauty was the key to sales. *Fine then, I’ll steal the look and sell it!*

We returned to the inn in a hustle and bustle, where we found the rest of the class hanging out. It was too early to prepare for the dungeon, but there wasn’t enough time to go to a restaurant. Above all, they wanted lunch. The leading request for the day was omu-soba. I guess that meant wrapping yakisoba in an omelet?

“Welcome back!”

“We’ve been waiting!”

“I’ll pay extra to eat! Whatever it takes!”

“Uh, I haven’t even started cooking yet?”

They even ordered second helpings in advance. I had plenty of mayo stock, and I’d got my hands on mustard too, so throw in some cabbage and bean sprouts into a pork something-or-other… I could’ve really used some steamed fish paste and fish cakes, but some might criticize that as too daring. I mean, I had mustard, so I could wrangle together some sorta sauce and mass-produce it. I already had noodles ready from yesterday. Now I just had to stir-fry, and bam, ready!

“Haruka, we’re starving!”

“Well, hunger is the best sauce, isn’t it? So just stay hungry all the time! Well, then you’ll die, but…y’know?”

“Shut up and get us our food!”

I expanded my pan with Alchemy into a giant dome shape, heated it up, added plenty of oil, and mixed everything together until it billowed steam. I used Holding to shake up the giant wok pan and stir-fry everything together, swirling everything around as I drizzled in more oil, and repeated. I had to make portions for at least sixty, eighty just to be safe, although even that probably wouldn’t be enough. *Better make some rice balls, too*. I had kelp now, but I really wished I had those dried umeboshi plums.

And then came the avalanche of cries for seconds. We were in *Attack on Seconds, Re: Seconds*. After tidying up, we needed to get ready for the dungeon, but for me that just meant wearing the same stuff I always did. Miss Armor Rep was wearing her armor, Slimey was a Slime…he could just go as his charming self. And no one ever helped me with the cleanup. I could do it instantly, but seriously, no offers? Whatever, I’d give everyone dessert. That would summon Poster Girl and Stalker Girl, and at least they’d offer to lend a hand, right? And as for the meat-nerds…no, I couldn’t let them do the dishes! *They’ll definitely start throwing them and fetching them!* They’d use the plates like frisbees!

“All right, time to earn some money!”

“Let’s go!”

“Yeah!”

Class Rep took the lead, with the first group going ahead to clear the upper levels of the dungeon. I was strictly forbidden from interfering, so I just had to while away my time by participating in an extremely dangerous Miss Armor Rep boot camp. It was having an effect on the girls, who looked more toned than I remembered. *Their waists are hella narrow!* And they were getting muscular too—slimmer, with more pleasing proportions.

Teenage guys couldn’t help but steal a glance every once in a while, and the meat-nerds had no other interesting scenery to rest their eyes upon. And you don’t need to tell me what happened when they stared.

“We’re on a roll now, but don’t let down your guard!” commanded Class Rep.

“Got it!”

“Yep. But we’re ready!”

There weren’t many secret chambers on the upper floors, so we made quick progress. Judging from past dungeons, this one didn’t seem like it would be very deep. The dungeon king was probably on the 50th floor. This dungeon was pretty weak to begin with.

“The Ultimate Dungeon had such an intimidating, elegant atmosphere. That was a first-rate sophisticated dungeon, know what I’m saying? None of the ones after even come close, y’know?”

Wiggle wiggle?

Better buildings tended to be bigger. There might not be any dungeons as nice as the Ultimate Dungeon from here on out.

“Whoaaaa!”

“She’s a genuine skill collector—of course she could pull that off!”

The girls were sweeping their way through the floors. I shivered. They were a little *too* efficient! Class Rep was wielding a whip now, which gave me a vague sense of dread.

“I thought you were going for a shield job, and now you’re using a whip?!”

She destroyed a group of level 16 silent bees on her own, cracking the whip so quickly that it became invisible to the human eye, and with some serious range, too. Unstoppable.

“Perhaps we need to start calling her Mistress Class Rep-sama, huh?”

Nod nod.

Jiggle jiggle!

That whip would go well with bondage gear, but I’d get in deep trouble for crafting some. I was already getting some glares, which meant I’d be in the doghouse forever if they knew for sure what I was thinking deep down! How did she already uncover my new fetishes?!

Class Rep’s skill allowed her to bring out the true might of the weapon. It was the “Thunderbolt Chain Whip: All stats +70%. + ATT. Thunderbolt. Whirlwind. 100 Blows. Sky Burst. Adaptable range shifting.” It was the result of the nerds’ attempt to make bows, powered up with

mithril and enchantments with a spellstone. And because Class Rep was the only person with the Whip Mastery skill, I sold it to her on an affordable payment plan. I think everyone knew deep down that Class Rep would be the one to crack the whip, but don't tell her I said that.

"Don't—you—start—your—creepy—bullshit!" Class Rep snapped.

"Whoa, her lashes are getting stronger!"

"They're breaking the speed of sound!"

Apparently, she initially got Whip Mastery by using Hijack on a plant-type monster. Binding, as well. Better believe (B) that dungeon (D) sleaze (S) monster (M) was into that. Class Rep kind of freaked out and beat it to a sticky pulp… *Shh, only dreams for you now, plant buddy.*

"Nobody would want to wake up from that. Good job getting robbed by Class Rep, those skills (S) are (&) made (M) for her!"

Nod nod!

Boing boing.

Since she did have Whip Mastery now, I'd asked Class Rep if she was into that stuff. She just got mad at me and started a whole glare-filled lecture. Well, I had to ask!

"It kind of suits her *too* well."

"I'm just gonna obey. She's scary now!"

"I don't know if it's the Whirlwind, the Hundred Blows, or the Sky Burst, but—"

"Let's stay away!"

The lashing whips pulverized the endless swarm of bees, faster than a sonic boom.

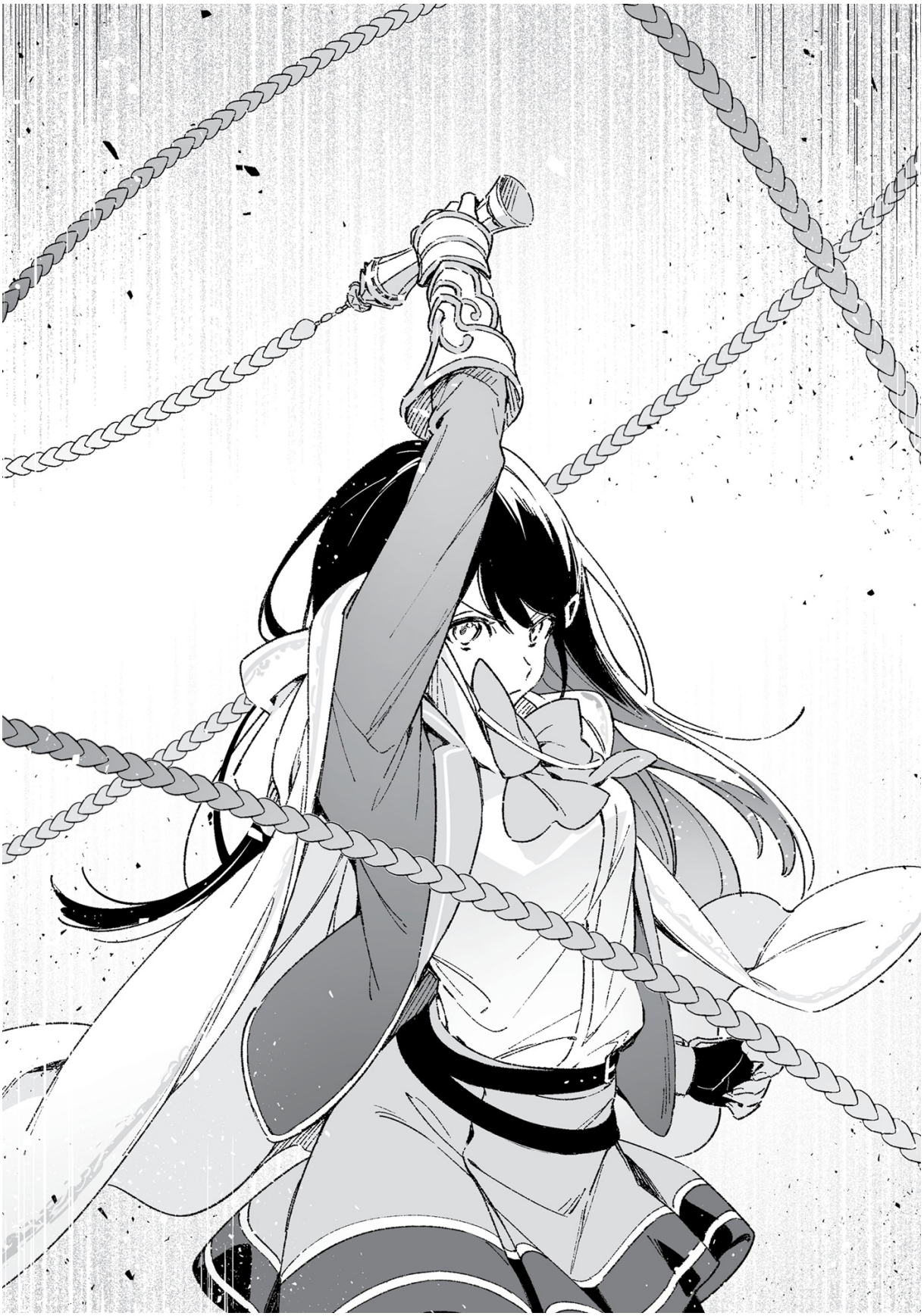
"I mean, having a whip as a weapon in the first place is pretty wild! Their cracks break the sound barrier! Having someone with skills use that at level 99, loading the whip with effects… A zippy, whippy high school girl with an invincible whip and *special* interests, my god! I'm buzzing! H-hang on, I'm not a bee, I'm just a teenage boy babbling. I may as well be quiet!"

"Shut it with that 'zippy whippy' stuff!"

“Quiet’s good!” the girls called.

Jiggle jiggle.

Then, she exterminated them with a single flash of thunder. That was Mistress Class Rep-sama for you.



“Nice work, Mistress Class Rep-sama!” everyone squeaked.

“What’s with the butt-kissing honorifics? And why is everyone trembling? I’m not scary! Right?”

Class Rep with teary eyes—now that was a sight. They suited her… this was her calling! Whatever this whole deal was, whether it was whip wielding or being a domme—whatever it was, this was it. She was strong. If she had been this strong against the Sphinx, we might have had a shot against it. That whip could’ve broken through that field of mummies for sure. She could have protected everyone. Ever since she failed that day, she had sought this level of power.

And now she had a way to mow through swarming enemies. That alone wouldn’t be enough to protect everyone, but huge groups of enemies were definitely dangerous, so this power was essential. Mistress Class Rep-sama could take on a swarm of any size. Since when was she this strong? Miss Armor Rep was overjoyed for her…and seemed to be looking forward to drilling her in their next training session. *I am so sorry, Class Rep.*

“Only Sergeant Armor Rep could be overjoyed in such a menacing way. Do I actually feel sorry for Class Rep?”

Jiggle jiggle.

It was the same feeling I got from her after I got Jupiter Eye. And she still beat the crap out of me. Obviously. The training was amazing, but… yeah, she beat me senseless. *That’s just how it goes. And will always go. Y’know?*

DAY 58

AFTERNOON

I think raining arrows will be pretty effective on life-forms that just run around without skills.

DUNGEON

I HAD ALREADY GIVEN UP on them, but the meatheads *still* chased after the monsters with their boomerangs in hand and whacked the enemy to death. *Seriously? Throw the boomerangs!*

The giant two-meter boomerangs I went to the trouble of making had just become a plus-sized bludgeon weapon. If they did throw the boomerangs, they'd just instinctually go fetch. Maybe frisbees were my best bet?

"I'm pretty sure they'd chase after bones if I threw 'em. Their weapons may as well be bones at this point. Bones would actually kind of suit them?"

Jiggle jiggle!

Running around after monsters holding giant bone clubs would perfectly suit the meatheads. I couldn't identify a single difference between them and cavemen. Well, besides the fact that hunter-gatherers were smarter. No doubt about that. They could craft their own weapons because they actually knew where bones came from.

Our class met back up and headed for the floors halfway down the dungeon. As I suspected, the equipment was starting to create differences in everyone's speed. We'd have trouble with battle maneuvers, but surely Class Rep would figure something out.

"We're going down!"

"Got it, Mistress Class Rep-sama!"

"Guys, cut it out! I'm going to cry! I swear!"

Seriously, nobody could disobey Class Rep with her Thunderbolt Chain Whip. Everyone agreed to call her Mistress Class Rep-sama, and even if she was upset about it, she was cute when she was mad. It was a win-win situation.

The rest of the class were strong as well—pretty much everyone was level 99. We were a group of level 99 humans versus monsters around level 50, and our teamwork was impeccable. Apply that to the middle floors of a dungeon, and it was pure devastation. A massive murderous marauding massacre. A certain whip wielder in particular was letting 'em have it!

"Going smooth, right?"

"But there are still lots of monsters."

"Don't worry, an absolute beast is taking care of them."

"We should be clearing this stage of the dungeon without problems anyway, but Mistress Class Rep-sama is virtually spanking them!"

"What do you mean, spanking?! And stop calling me Mistress! I'm telling you. You're going to make me cry, I hate it!"

Now that she had mastered the Thunderbolt Chain Whip, she could even take out large monsters in one hit. She could also use Binding if she needed to. She was Mistress Class Rep-sama, after all. I decided she needed some black leather boots. High ones, naturally.

"Having heels would be tough in a dungeon, but they'd just look so good!"

Jiggle jiggle.

But the more I imagined it, the more a teary-eyed Mistress Class Rep-sama did me the honor of punishing me with a glare. *I'll restrain myself.* Oh yes, I shall be restrained!

"I mean, Thunderbolt Chain Whip, that thing is nuts! You blew up that monster in a single whip! I'm sorry, Mistress Class Rep-sama, I'm terribly sorry!"

Please, I beg you, lower that whip? The triple combo of teary eyes, glaring, *and* staring was marvelous, but that whip was starting to terrify me!

Still, this was proof that a well-suited weapon could multiply anyone's potential in combat. We were finally scraping together some powerful equipment for defeating dungeons. Just thinking about the meatheads' ill-suited weapons was making my brain melt, so I had to just ignore them. *I'm not looking*. Not at the meatheads surrounding monsters and whacking them with boomerangs. Not anymore!

The nerd Guardian had changed his weapon to a halberd. It packed a devastating punch. Apparently, the nerds were trying to make ballistae and that'd popped out instead. That was actually their best mistake yet, but if I was thinking about their mistakes like that, I must have gotten a serious case of nerd poisoning. Well, whatever. I'd power it up with mithril after we got back. It was already plenty strong as it was.

The fact that the nerds' mistakes turned out better than a lot of my weapons pissed me off. That halberd consumed too much MP, though. As Nerd C got accustomed to using it, we continued wrecking shop. It could hardly be called a fair fight. There weren't any secret chambers either, so we made it to the 34th floor just in the nick of time for some urgent dungeon business—everyone demanded a three o'clock snack!

"Oh like, I'm not busy? Like I have nothing to do? Literally? The list of things I don't have to do is infinite, actually, no worries?"

"Snacks!"

Jiggle jiggle!

No need to rush. It seemed like we'd be done with today soon. We could rest and still be out of the dungeon by evening, no sweat. We had gathered a ton of spellstones, too, so that meant plenty of pocket change!

"Well, if we're gonna be done soon, let's chill. And not that this needs saying, but I'm going to rip you all off on these snacks. So sorry about that, but it's not my fault? Because it's jelly? You jelly? You know?"

"Just hand it over!"

Jiggle jiggle!

I gave some to Slimey at first, who ate it up as he jiggled in time with the jiggling jelly snack. He liked it. I'm sure Slimey worked up an appetite in the dungeon, so he deserved a good snack. Snacks balanced the scales!

And the books! I mean, I needed to make money to pay my inn fees. Teenage boys will do whatever it takes to meet their obligations* (*prevent lectures).

"Seconds please! I'll pay with spellstones!"

"You're still getting a lecture, though! You haven't paid your inn fees, right?!"

They knew! Probably because I told them that I was charging them for sweets. I'd needed the money for inn fees the last time I ripped them off. Totally unfair! This fantasy world had me dodging lectures on false pretenses! And weren't they digging the jelly? C'mon!

"I'm broke now!"

"Gotta earn more!"

"Let's keep going!"

Mistress Class Rep-sama tucked her whip into her belt and transformed back to her regular sword and shield-wielding Class Rep self. If she didn't, the other girls wouldn't get enough training. That whip didn't leave any kills for the others. Monsters were a limited and precious resource —just like my jelly, which meant plenty of profits for me!

"So sweet. So good."

"Why does everything taste better in this world?"

Jiggle jiggle.

The nerds were doing all right. They were clumsy at everything. Why did they always screw up in practice but end up pulling it together in actual combat? They lacked fundamentals, but they still packed a punch.

The nerds' cheat skills meant true strength. They couldn't trust their own muscles or nerves, but they trusted themselves. They'd prepared a ridiculous amount in the hope of coming to a fantasy world, and even learned martial arts…so why hadn't all that training made any of them into hunks? They were planning to rely on cheats even before coming here!

In terms of overall strength, student council squad members were on top, but as a party, it had to be the mean girls. They had no weak links. They were all-rounders who didn't specialize in any one area, but could shift

between magic and swords or the mid-guard and vanguard, making them adaptable and fit for a range of combat. Their cooperation was excellent, too, and they excelled at both providing support and turning the tide on delicate situations. The meatheads were at the top in terms of pure attack power, the sports girls were best at defense, and the arts club girls specialized in the mid- and rearguard positions. They were also the toughest to classify because they were all all-rounders. I had no chance of figuring out how to organize this lot.

Mistress Class Rep-sama was perfectly suited to disciplining the meatheads. Now, with her whip, she could tame them on another level. *Maybe you should call this animal training?*

The 39th floor finally had a secret chamber, but the fight dragged on. That was because my classmates wanted to test out the training they'd done on composite bows. The idea was to defeat the enemy with a rain of arrows without using special bow effects, but in practice, it was hard to coordinate perfectly. And why were the meatheads (of all people!) showing the most discipline? That pissed me off!

But the rain of arrows found their mark on the level 39 poison salamanders, and my classmates charged in to finish the salamanders off. Their military prowess was impressive. They might even beat the frontier army in a practice match. All *they* did was charge in blindly. Seriously, how do you call that man a god of slaughter? Did they somehow mix that up with god of laughter? Ha ha, *idiot*.

"I'm bored, so I'm gonna check out the secret chamber. There are three left, so I'm just gonna finish 'em off, 'kay? Miss Armor Rep and Slimey were so restless with boredom, they even started playing cat's cradle. But we're in another world here! Making the Tokyo Tower is pretty lame, y'know? For real?"

Not to mention playing cat's cradle with wires and wire cutters was pretty dangerous in the first place.

Wiggle wiggle.

Slimey had been looking hungry, so I let him have the three salamanders. He dug right in. Guess they were tasty? He probably wanted Flame Body, although he already had Arc Inferno from the phoenix—you

might say he already *consumed* Arc Inferno from the phoenix. You'd expect him to get fired up, but he was pretty chill about it.

"Surprise! Secret chamber discovery! Well, I kind of knew it was coming from the last floor but, boom, discovery! A level 39 king salamander! Kinda tasty, I guess? So long as it's tasty, all good with me, good with me—if kinda stale. I'm kind of used to it at this point? You feel?"

But by the time I crouched into my battle pose (I tried a few times, just to get it perfect), the battle was already over. My long-awaited chance to fight, and it'd been plucked out from under my very nose. And after that pose I did… Well, I *say* "after." I was kind of *still* in that pose in the now-empty room. The king salamander disappeared from right in front of my eyes, and I stayed right where I was. Kinda like time stopped.

"It was my biblical destiny to slay that salamander! Not cool, Slimey! Hey! Stop it!"

Whacking myself with a stick to try and get at the slime stuck to my head was definitely not a good look. Time started up again and I was spinning and flailing.

Jiggle jiggle!

Shake shake.

I had no chance. This was a flawless ambush. Just not one that came from this dungeon, strictly speaking.

"Annnd we're back! Looks like a 'Wall Boots: Vitality, Speed +30%. Wall walking.' So some footwear. Definitely a popular item for bow-users in battle, something y'all will definitely, like, totally fight over it to see who gets the totally tubular profits? Epic loot drop! Event flag for more, please?"

"I want them!" everyone shouted.

"I wanna wall-walk!"

I mean, the meatheads were already halfway up the walls from sheer excitement…well, not quite. If they actually could do that then I'm pretty sure "Human" would have disappeared from their statuses. *Totally?* Totally.

DAY 58

AFTERNOON

I can think of a few ways for us to work out our frustrations together, but her methods for taking out her frustrations on me are frustrating.

DUNGEON

44TH FLOOR

A SHARP SOUND pierced the air as arrows rained down from the sky. A simultaneous, wide-sweeping attack with no place to flee. As the arrows found their marks, absolute devastation.

"Fire!"

"Jaaaaaah!"

Those bows were seriously serious. When fired all at once, the enemy literally had no escape. Asynchronous fire created a constant rainfall of bows, and as soon as the rain stopped, they charged to crush the enemy. And after that rain of arrows, mounting a defense against their charge was difficult. Guarding from above left them vulnerable head on. Humans are definitely the most dangerous creatures out there.

"These bows are amazing, right?"

"It's like a flurry of unlimited consecutive attacks!"

"Our simultaneous attacks are, like, *majorly* incredible!"

"Now I know what they mean by 'raining arrows.'"

"Defs!"

With spears protruding out from behind their shields, they stormed forward in a high-speed charge. Finally, they wiped out the enemy in a flurry of sword blows. This was domination. Those bows were nasty. Even one of them was menacing with its high-speed, ranged strikes, but a group of them together under unified command changed this into tactical warfare.

It was an overwhelming, brutalizing offensive that allowed no room for a counterattack.

"Huh. Looks like they kept guarding their heads from the arrows even though they saw everyone coming straight on?"

Nod nod.

It was an all-you-can-kill fest over there. My classmates were practically unbeatable with that strategy, but the arrows weren't always reusable. A heavy-armored opponent meant they definitely weren't.

"We can't let our guard down," said Class Rep. "We're still not perfectly aligned, so let's keep at it until we can nail three consecutive attacks."

"So strict!"

Class Rep still wasn't satisfied, even though the monsters of the 40th floor all died without getting in so much as a single hit. It didn't matter if they were weak or strong; they got massacred before they could even fight. The one good thing was that it made for practical battle experience.

"I think we can do better transitioning into our charge."

"Yeah, I don't really like just throwing my bow to the ground."

"And adding magic to the mix is just too hard."

Without magic, they might run into trouble with an armored or speedy enemy. But versus a regular group of monsters…this army dominated. They did it. The nerds said that they were trying to make ballistae, which would give our class its own complete tactical niche. Book Club President was definitely the mastermind here. She knew that Miss Armor Rep and I were ill-suited for fighting other people, so she made sure our class specialized in it. I guessed she was trying to protect me…even though the whole point of war was to kill other people.

The girls understood that. I knew they all did. Not the meatheads, obviously. They didn't understand anything. But to have the conviction to go to war…even though they were just ordinary high school students two months ago. Plus, it didn't really matter that the meatheads didn't understand. They instinctively understood competition, and fighting for your life was just another way of doing that. They didn't need a whole

ideology—heck, if they found one suddenly, I'd get suspicious. They didn't even understand boomerangs!

"After you fire an arrow, why do you charge in waving your boomerangs?! Those are ranged weapons! Throw them, dammit!"

"Just vibes, man."

Class Rep, who had been stealing skills with Hijack, knew best of all. The mean girls' adaptability made them the strongest warriors in the group. They could use swords, spears, and shields, magic attacks and magic defense. Even healing magic. They had also perfectly mastered bows; they had even learned a little about techniques for inflicting status ailments—I mean, even if they got a little experience from me, that experience wouldn't have taught them all of *this!* They had plenty of skills that I lacked.

"Vanguard, fire flat, straight-on. Rearguard, launch a curved shot to seal off any escape," Class Rep commanded.

"Yes, sir!"

Soon enough, we were on the 44th floor. It was an involved strategy, but a devastating one. My classmates stopped the movements of a rampaging pack of level 44 blue wolves with a rain of arrows, and wiped them out in an instant. Next up, secret chamber.

"All that's left is cleaning up the escaped blue wolves and spellstone pickup, but you can have 'em, y'know? In fact, bring 'em to the secret chamber, picking them up is annoying. I'm gonna run away, 'kay? There's still a treasure in this dungeon, so you might as well spend 'em on something, right? Probably?"

"He literally sprinted away!"

Since the blue wolves ran all over the place, the spellstones were scattered far and wide. That, plus the arrows lodged in the floor everywhere, made pickup an honest-to-God pain. And if I didn't give Miss Armor Rep a chance to fight, she'd get frustrated before long. I mean, I could think of a few ways for us to work out our frustrations together, but her methods for taking out her frustrations on me were pretty frustrating to me? I was, of course, talking about the magnificent frustration-erasing technique, the one that all teenage boys frustrate over all day long, and are frustrated by until they receive it… You know how it is.

Graaaaaahhh!

Oh, a real challenge? It was a big blue wolf, a stronger enemy than expected. Since it was the lone wolf separated from the pack I kind of underestimated it, but it was a beast.

“By the time I recognized it, we’d already charged full speed at it. But slowing down and actually fighting this won’t be easy.”

Jiggle jiggle.

It had a high speed stat and the reflexes of a wild animal. If you weren’t an adventurer at least level 100 or so, this thing had a good chance of taking you out. But, I mean, it was dealing with Miss Armor Rep, so it had no chance. She had been plenty bored before, but now she was having way too much fun with her high-speed big blue wolf fight. I wanted to play with Miss Armor Rep too, but looked like I wouldn’t be able to until tonight. And the moment I thought that, an arrow-rain of glares shot at me. Asynchronous fire!

“Well, I was thinking about sex the whole time. So it was more like one penetrating glare, rather than asynchronous fire. If you’ve got enough time to glare at me, why don’t you finish it off already?”

I was resisting my playful urges to mischievously play with Miss Armor Rep, I swear. The fact that her armor was sexy was a real problem, ’cause I could see her entire, enticing, enchanting figure and curves through the armor. This was 18+ broadcast armor for sure, so hot that I almost launched an attack myself. Damn. I’m swearing. I’m so horny!

And as she fended off a series of claw strikes from the giant wolf, she showered me in a series of nasty looks, and then cut through the beast in a snowstorm of platinum. Glittering lines shot across the room—all while she was glaring at me! She seemed like she was getting angry, so I had to stop thinking about this. *But I can’t! I mean, how do I suppress the eternal urges of a teenage boy?* My libido was wound around my very soul!

Now then, while shrugging off the vicious glare attack, I opened up the treasure chest for…more boots. Was this the shoe dungeon? We didn’t have enough boots and gloves to go around, so that was fine, but unless we found about thirty pairs, I wouldn’t get close to fulfilling our needs. With that in mind, I wasn’t sure if it made more sense to try to assemble a single

complete set of armor, or to get as many of one kind of garment as possible. I doubted I had to worry about armor for the villagers, so it made the most sense to prioritize upgrading a whole set of armor with mithril. I guess.

"Boots again, this time it's 'Kicking Boots: Power, Speed, Vitality +30%. Kick. +ATT.' So, kicking? Not sure if trampling is allowed or not, but this sounds like something for Mistress Class Rep-sama? They don't have high heels, so you can't crush things properly, you know?"

The girls were resting after gathering all the spellstones. They'd picked up the used arrows, as well, which they had placed in a neat pile… *Don't tell me they want me to mend them all?*

"Aw, no high heels?"

"Aww, man."

"Why do you all want me to wear high-heeled boots so badly?!" snapped Class Rep. "I wouldn't wear those even if we found them! Don't be so disappointed!"

"All right, calm down."

I decided to put these up for auction when we got back. 30% boosts to power, speed, and vitality, plus the ATT boost—even without the kicking, that was a good item. Seriously, though, would Kick work for crushing? Because if so, then maybe I could add some heels on the bottom to perfectly complement the whip attack… The whole package would work so well together!

No, nothing. I wouldn't say a word. I mean, I *was* imagining a little something, but I wasn't going to think it through. Well, I mean, I *had been* thinking about making a bondage dress, but not anymore, so put the whip away please? Because there won't be any high heels, so it's a little pointless, right? Stilettos gotta have a point.

"I'm so terribly sorry! Please spare me thy whip! I mean seriously, that Thunderbolt Chain Whip is way too powerful, it'll put me to sleep forever the moment it awakens something inside of me. Yes, that's right, that glare is the perfect punishment, I'm done, I swear. Probably."

Class Rep growled. Mad + glare. But seriously, a long-coat kind of bondage dress would bolster her defense decently, and even more so with

all the straps. And through the slits in the tight leather, I would be able to see glimpses of Mistress Class Rep-sama's pale skin, an eroticism of hot-icism, all thanks to sweet bondage… Uh, don't mind me, I was just planning a new outfit. Pardon? I was muttering all that aloud? Since when?

"Uh oh. Don't tell me I said 'she's got an overpowering bondage vibe' or 'give her some pliers and dominate me, baby' aloud? Well, I don't blame you for getting mad about that!"

Nod nod.

Jiggle jiggle.

That naturally resulted in a rage + glare shower. All right, back to dungeon time, baby! *Okay, I'm really sorry! Maybe if I pat her on the head? Maybe some sweets? That will definitely fix things.*

In the world where I came from, some sweets plus a head pat solved all problems, as long as you didn't count, like, public health and safety as a real problem. I always had some sweet potato snacks on me. Yeah, see? It definitely wasn't so bad! She was eating it with a smile, y'know?

DAY 58

DUNGEON

All of this oozy dripping and slobbering and entwining is on the menu?

50TH FLOOR

THINGS WEREN'T AS BAD as they could have been on this floor, but they certainly weren't awesome. Well, awesomely stinky, that's for sure. Aside from that, not amazing.

All of my classmates had on equipment that would resist status ailments from a level 50 dungeon-boss-class monster. I sold them the items, after all. And this stench inflicted Confusion and Fainting status effects. They had resisted every status ailment up until now, but a nasty stench was a nasty stench. It was way too stinky up close. It even stank from a distance! I wanted everyone to finish up quickly, but that odor was pretty strong, and they were struggling to make progress. It was a bad matchup, no doubt about it.

The boss in question: "Dryad Rafflesia, Lv: 50." The boss in question: "Dryad Rafflesia, Lv: 50." That monster brute was nothing more than a giant floral plant-type monster, with its real weapon stored inside the calyx—the sturdy green leaves under the petals, same as any man keeping his real weapon in his pants, y'know? But this was a fantasy world boss, and that meant it had lots of random crap tacked on—in this case, tentacles.

The nerds looked ready to take it home with us, if you know what I mean, but that was off the table. It simply reeked too much. I didn't want something so nasty to get the hots for me, and I didn't think Poster Girl would be pleased if we brought it to the inn.

"I do get the whole adult appeal of a few deliciously applied tentacles, but this just smells way too bad!" I told them.

"Yeah, it's too smelly to be any good."

Slimey didn't seem like he wanted to eat it either…it smelled too bad. As for what exactly the smell would ruin, the moment the nerds started to describe things, we got a rain of dirty looks showered in our direction. Oh, and a bunch of evil flower tentacles, of course. We'd been devastated, and now it was time to do our own devastating.

"What are you guys daydreaming about?" the girls hollered at the nerds.

"Ah, sorry!"

The first round of concentrated arrow fire had no effect, nor did the following blast of Inferno magic. They couldn't get too close because of the squirming tentacles. The squirming, and the sliming, and the dripping, and the drooling. No teenage girl would dare approach that. Only unpleasant things could result. *Is that why all of their faces were bright red?*

"Crap! Our ranged attacks aren't working!"

"And the tentacles can expand, too!"

"*And* it reeks! *And* it's straight out of a hentai!"

The hentai flower had Magic Absorption and MP Absorption, so getting caught by those tentacles would be bad news. It even had Class Rep's Binding ability, so there was no chance of escape. The thick, meaty tendrils weren't suffering any damage—slash attacks were bound to be the most effective, so you'd need to go in for a close-range attack. But if you did, you might get caught up in a hentai… *Now, this is problematic.*

For some reason the nerds had sat down in formal sitting positions to watch.

"Boys! Stand up and fight!"

"They're already at attention. Maybe they should be standing at atten—n-nothing, not saying anything!"

"The tips of the tentacles are so gross! They're all squirmy!"

"Twisty!"

"It's actually trying to grab us!"

"We can't get caught at any cost! It'd be too embarrassing!"

It also had Revival, so the tentacles would grow back after you cut them. Well, once Class Rep whipped out her whip, that would probably do the job, but she probably didn't want to carry the charge all by herself. Bludgeon attacks would be ineffective, which ruled out Vice Rep B and the meatheads. Speaking of…

"Y'all are sword classes, so put away the boomerangs!" I roared. "Or at least friggin' throw 'em!"

"But then we have to chase them and get close to the stink!"

"No, you throw them, then that's *the end*!"

"Say whaaaaat?!"

The arts club girls in the rearguard had started to dig. The hentai plant had roots in the ground that allowed it to absorb magic and revive indefinitely. So, the roots needed to be destroyed. That would hinder its restoration, and the girls would be able to damage it faster than it could heal itself. Little problem? The roots were also tentacles. Now the ground itself was squirming.

"Ruuun! Evasive maneuvers!"

"What the?!"

"It's coming! Underground!"

"The hell is this?!"

Tentacles were bursting and squirming out of the ground everywhere, sending the formation reeling into chaos. Now everyone was hightailing it away, swinging their weapons around. Miss Armor Rep shook her head. No pass today, I suppose. Why couldn't they see? We *literally* discussed countermeasures for this, but instead they just got stuck in their otherworldly ways.

"It has Magic Absorption and MP Absorption even though it doesn't know magic—now use your brains and figure out the obvious answer! I mean, it's so obvious?"

Jiggle jiggle.

The ground had been totally enveloped in tentacles. My classmates had no place left to run.

“Haruka-kuuuun!” called Vice Rep B. “Why don’t you, like, help us, or whatevs?”

“That’s fine with me, but do you really need me? Because you got this. Right?”

If I stepped in, the battle would end instantly, as usual. I even explained to them in simple terms the perfect plan for this kind of situation. But now the tentacles were eating up every possible place for them to hide. In fact, some of them were already getting—*captured?* Shiiit! *Oh, shiiiiiit!*

“Waaaaaah!”

“Save me! Don’t look, but *save me*!”

“Just don’t look!”

“No, save us!”

Gurgle gurgle!

Yeah, the rafflesia knew what was up. I mean, we had the same appendages, it was just more stinky than me? If it didn’t have the Stench skill, we might’ve stayed up all night discussing all-night things. A real shame. If Class Rep killed this rafflesia and used Hijack, then she’d end up with tentacles…and Stench! We’d need to seal that one somehow. It’d make life tough at the inn.

“Aaaaaahhh!”

“Stop gawking! Save me!”

“Uh, I’m here for the show?” I said.

“THIS IS NOT A SHOW!”

“Mmmm, so slimy, I can’t cut through it… Hey, get over here!”

“Get away!”

Among the pandemonium, the nerds nerdled. They didn’t know where to look, and they certainly couldn’t look at the rafflesia. What remaining defense they’d retained was completely cornered.

“Waaaaah! Get away! Not there!”

“This is the worst, stop, stop!”

“The tentacles are touching me th—no, not there!”

The tentacles used Binding and wrapped around the girls, and were now slithering under their armor, which the girls were freaking out about for whatever reason. The tentacles wrapped up their legs and held them in midair. *This monster has style.*

“What a waste of a monster’s talent,” I sighed. “If it wasn’t a plant, you could call it a pimp. Hey, it’s a girl-dealing plant, so maybe it really is a pimp?”

Wiggle wiggle?

Meanwhile, the meatheads were busy running around with their boomerangs and whacking them against the tentacles. How many centuries would pass before they learned to throw them? They still had some evolving to do. And they had degenerated ever since coming here, catch my drift? They had forgotten civilization altogether. They went from medieval all the way back to the prehistoric level, and now beyond. Maybe they were in the Cretaceous period at this point? Why did I get the sense that dinosaurs were smarter?

“Haruka-kun! We give up!”

“My maidenhood is at stake!”

“Seriously, this is bad bad bad *bad*!”

Somehow, I got the impression this might be bad. Well, the 18+ line had certainly been crossed. If not for the stink, I would’ve tried to recruit this monster for the pseudo-dungeon. It was my kinda guy. I mean, the tentacles were…er, pressing on the right spots, and prying open the right places? Yeah, it really knew what to do. This was unfortunate. Oh, well! I burned it.

“B-but magic shouldn’t have worked…right?”

“Y-yeah. What just happened?”

I just used science and burned it. The rafflesia couldn’t reach its tentacles straight above its body, so I got there with Airwalk, dumped a bunch of oil, and lit it on fire. Then Miss Armor Rep helped the girls sever themselves out of the tentacles. I felt a sense of sadness as the tentacles went up, because it had Magic Absorption and MP Absorption, but no fire

resistance. Exactly the same as the treants I fought in the Ultimate Dungeon.

"It's…burning?"

"The exterior is crumbling! We can attack!"

"Oh, it's gonna get its punishment!"

"Jaaah!"

If they'd just thought things through, using the common sense we'd learned in a world without magic, the plan of action was clear: obviously, we should just use oil and burn it. This world was magic. It had Magic Absorption and MP Absorption, so magic fire was no good. Everyone just got caught up in the fantasy world, just like they got caught up in the tentacles. That was pretty shameful, or more precisely, pretty pornographic. Because the rafflesia had Dissolve too, circumstances went from pornographic to plain illegal. A loss of a real specimen. Kind of a stinky one, though.

"You have been accused of sexually assaulting young girls!"

"Guilty! Guilty! Guilty!"

The rafflesia writhed in agony as it burned alive. The girls sat down in a huddle, covering their bodies where their armor had been eaten away, breathing heavily and gleaming with sweat from the glow of the flames. Tough day for them.

They seemed pissed. They should be totally exhausted…but their faces were bright red.

"Well, you all totally failed, which means you've all won one free participation in Miss Armor Rep's boot camp! You'll be getting whacked and bonked in a spectacular fashion—a nonstop beatdown! And you're invited! Mistress Class Rep-sama in particular has been extended a very special invitation. She'll be doing some down and dirty one-on-one lessons—and I don't mean in a combat way, I definitely mean a lesbian way. And I would very much like to see that beatdown up close from the sidelines, yes indeed."

"Beatdown? Like beating off?"

"We're gonna get knocked out tonight!"

“But not by lesbian stuff!”

Okay, so they shut that part down. They weren’t about to start a special lesbian romance, fine, I mean, the lovely lady in question was eternally seventeen, just like that one voice actress. A lovely lady indeed.

“Ugh! It’s only the dungeon bosses that are too hard!”

“They’re the mortal enemy of maidens!”

“And that one smelled like shit.”

“*Not* the tentacle monster I was imagining.”

“*What the hell were you imagining?!”*

There were many mysteries in a fantasy world, but the most mysterious one of all was the seventeen-year-old problem. How to be seventeen forever? Not that there was any solution. I’d only hurt myself if I thought about it too hard. For sure.

DAY 58

DUNGEON

She was not captivated by her hopes and dreams, but by lust and tentacles.

50TH FLOOR

THE SLIMY, DRIPPING GIRLS collapsed to the floor out of sheer exhaustion. They looked like dead fish. But somehow…sexy? So, I boiled some water from my item bag and made a giant water ball for them to use to shower. Ergo, they were all showering the sticky juice off their bodies, but they were all in armor, so it wasn't that hot. Watching wasn't any fun; all I had was my imagination. *What can I say? I'm a teenage boy. That excuses me of all responsibility!*

"Ooogh, I got thoroughly defiled!"

"Uh, phrasing?!"

Were they so bummed out because they were tired, or because they failed? I guess they wouldn't be this slimy if they won. They should have quit firing arrows at the outside once they saw it wasn't effective and instead launched a high-speed charge straight for the core. Given it everything they had. Would've been stinky, but effective. The battle only got so chaotic because they tried so many different things—they'd ended up tying their own hands. It was a leadership failure, too—a failure by Class Rep to organize the class. Maybe she should have burst through it solo with her whip. So, she was super bummed.

"I'm so sorry," she said. "That was all my fault."

"Don't worry about it!"

"Yeah, it would be dangerous for you to charge in alone without knowing anything."

"Yeah, but the bow strategy was a complete disaster. I'm sorry."

"Don't worry about it, we all agreed to it."

My class just plain wasn't a good matchup for dungeon bosses, for whatever reason. They lost to the phoenix on carelessness. Even if Slimey and the Sand Giant hadn't been too bad, the class was still poor at matching up with the exceptionally strong dungeon bosses. They got trapped by excessive cautiousness. The Book Club President's training focused too much on combat with humans.

"It sure *seemed* like it'd work."

"When the arrows fail, we don't have much else to fall back on."

The vibes around here were starting to bum me out.

"Time to reflect!"

"If we *can* take the first blow, we may as well, right?"

"Well, that depends on the opponent. Our offense overpowered everything else right away."

"Right?!"

The guys piped up.

"Maybe we were too fixated on using the bows."

"But since we did make them, we may as well use them, right?"

Ah, dudes. Just as clueless as ever.

"It all depends on the enemy."

Nod nod.

Jiggle jiggle.

All they needed was a full-out high-speed charge, but they would've needed to wipe the boss out in one blow, or there'd be trouble.

"It's such a disadvantage to not be able to see the bosses' stats, right?"

"You need…more…experience," said Miss Armor Rep.

Wiggle wiggle.

If their magic attacks got absorbed, they could switch to real fire and earth. Throwing rocks would've been fine too. It would've skipped right past all those immunities. And the monster was only level 50, so level 99

magic attacks should've overwhelmed it. My classmates were stubborn to say the least. A certain Vice Rep B refused to use magic altogether.

I assumed she was saving extra MP to use Resuscitation in an emergency. Regular healing magic did the trick for poison and injuries, but if someone suddenly died, Resuscitation was the only way to save them. And since you couldn't use Resuscitation if you waited too long, you needed to have an extra reserve of MP saved up. And the most likely people to suddenly die here…were Miss Armor Rep and me. Resuscitation was a powerful spell, and could only be used by an Archsage. Furthermore, it required tons of MP. That was why she saved up her magic. In case someone died.

"Why aren't her damn MP batteries enough, though?"

"Batteries, too slow. Fast, hard to recharge," said Miss Armor Rep.

Since when?! It explained why she always fought with hand-to-hand combat despite her magic specialization and poor combat stats. Well, she probably also kind of had a thing for it, looking at the smile on her face when she went around beating the shit out of monsters. And then there was, *naturally*, the jiggling! Those must be where she stored all that MP!

"So, I mean, there are a bunch of soaking wet, dripping, slimy teenage girls here, so why don't we go back to the inn? Because even if I burned this place, it'd still smell bad, and I don't want the smell to get into the equipment. Especially because you ladies are soooo wet and all."

"We're ready to leave, but don't call us *wet*!"

Wiggle wiggle.

A small break to change clothes. In the meantime, the nerds had finished their ballistae, so maybe a bow-based strategy would have worked?

Wait. Those are actually halberds. Again.

"Ballistae would've been better, but those aren't bad."

Nod nod.

Halberds. Also known as pikes, spear-axes, and axe-spears—long-handled spears with axes and sharp hooks on the end. With their overpowering strength and variety, and versatility in terms of stabbing, slashing, and swinging, they were suited to all forms of combat. But due to

their weight, they were difficult to use for extended periods. The nerds didn't even intend to make halberds, but they ended up with some halfway decent skills anyway.

The girls had mastered a wide variety of weapons, although it was difficult to change weapons mid-combat. So, the girls with high POW and DEX stats could probably master the halberds, too.

"All right nerds, you piss me off in general. The fact that these halberds are more high-spec than the ballistae you were *trying* to make pisses me off even more!"

Jiggle jiggle.

What mattered was that they were good weapons for warfare. They'd require some swift adaptability in terms of strategic approach, but we had a good commander behind the wheel, so no worries there. *Is she still upset?*

And I still wanted ballistae, but when it came to weapons that could be swung like clubs, I'd start with the meatheads. They'd wield ballistae like boomerangs, knowing them! *Throw* them rather than shoot them!

"Hmm, just grab these spellstones with an auto-spellstone collection…I wonder if there's some way to transition that into a combat spell."

A well-coordinated ballista strike would pack an incredible punch. It would require planning to get enough of them, but the nerds had the designs. And now they had halberd designs too, I guess.

On top of all that, not a single classmate had leveled up to 100. I'd figured there wasn't enough experience to go around, but at this point I was pretty sure that level 100 required some special condition.

The dungeon boss finally turned into a spellstone. It dropped an item along with it. It *still* stank. The drop item: "Rafflesia Flower: Rafflesia growth, control, manipulation."

"I purposefully didn't use Servitude and we got control of it anyway?!"

Jiggle jiggle!

The nerds were *very* interested. They saw a treasure, overflowing with their wildest hopes and dreams. Wet dreams, that is.

“Are your heads full of tentacles or what?” I snapped. “No, I better not question you too hard or something else might come spraying out. Those nerds’ brains are danger zones!”

“They’re fantasy world tentacles, though!” shouted the nerds.

“All right, that’s a unanimous vote to give the item to Haruka-kun,” said Class Rep.

“Waaah, boo-hoo…”

Uh, so the whole class decided to force it on me. Should I go grow some rafflesias back at my cave? Why’d everything with tentacles get shoved in my direction?

“Are you dumping this on me because I have tentacles?” I protested. “Was I chosen as the best tentaclist? No one else has them, so I’ve always been the best, but still?”

Wiggle wiggle?

The rafflesia flower didn’t smell too bad yet, so I decided to try growing it. It was a thorny yellow mystery plant… Maybe this was the magic herb that would heal my sex appeal?

“Let’s go home.”

“Yes!”

“Ah, I’m starving!”

Jiggle jiggle!

The girls wanted to get in the bath as fast as possible. They were spending a lot of time wet and dripping. But hey, if the rest of the class had Thunderbolt Chain Whips, this dungeon would’ve been a breeze.

First, I needed to power-up the Guardian’s halberd, and if everything checked out and looked good, rip the design off and make a few. But that wasn’t enough. Ideally, each party would be equipped with either one halberd or one Thunderbolt Chain Whip. The best strategy was usually an overwhelming offense anyway, so that would be the easiest and surest step to reduce danger for our class.

“Finally, we’re out.”

“Thank god. I’m exhausted.”

“And it reeked in there.”

“Time to lecture the boys who ran away!”

“Not for running away, for the—never mind, never mind!”

We had seven parties. I had the Dimension Blade, Miss Armor Rep, and Slimey, so we were safe without any additional weapons. The student council squad and the nerds had their weapons, so that left four parties. I’d rather each person have one of those souped-up weapons, but could I really make twenty-seven of them?

Maybe if I had the nerds do their weird weapon-making thing, we’d eventually get enough powerful items, but something about that rubbed me the wrong way. Maybe I’d come up with something at my side-job tonight…like equipment that resisted Dripping Wet and Slimy effects?

DAY 58

EVENING

Not a good idea to just start talking about things when you don't know what they're called.

INTERLUDE: THE WHITE LOSER INN

HARUKA-KUN HAD one nasty smile on his face when I got out of the bath. That meant only one thing: we were about to go bankrupt. That was the smile of a ruthless capitalist!

He had this hideous sneer whenever he was ripping us off, and yet no one, not a single time, even tried to run away from it. Because getting ripped off was a recipe for happiness. Getting ripped off was the law. It was the source of our contentment in this world.

When I first came to this world, I thought I was a goner. In fact, coming here was as bad as dying to me. I lived in fear of death, waiting for it.

I don't think I was the only one that felt this way. I could tell from the other girls' eyes. Exhaustion, hopelessness…living only because death was too scary. We were all waiting for the end. It was sad, it was painful, but still, we gave up on everything. It was just a matter of time before the inevitable occurred.

Then, in the dark forest, the end finally came. We were surrounded by a huge group of monsters with nowhere to run. We were scared, shaking—we knew that we couldn't overcome this. And yet the student council still put their bodies on the line trying to fight to protect us. They fought through the fear, sadness, pain, suffering—they wept as they battled. But deep down, they had given up, too.

There were too many monsters. They still fought, they still tried to protect us. But they knew. It was over.

Everyone was pushed to the brink, collapsing one after another against the horde of monsters. *I knew I would die in this cruel world,* I

thought. Fear, sadness, terror, pity. Frustration. *Why did I have to go this way?* But amid all those emotions bloomed relief that the end had come at last.

What good could possibly come out of being in this world, anyhow? We wore rags and had nothing to eat but bland, fried fish. We spent our days and nights in fear of monsters. The happy me from my old world was dead. This place was different. Everyone was injured. We fought only because we were scared to die.

At the time, even if someone had told me, *You will survive. You will be saved,* I wouldn't have wanted to keep going—until the scarlet rain fell. Until the luminous storm raged.

It was beautiful, and cruel. The sky was swollen with blood rain that battered the world, and the terrified monsters burned and perished. It was terrifying—and so beautiful that I cried.

The monsters were wiped out. Not a single one was left. A dark figure walked along the heaps of monster corpses.

At that moment, when I was sure I was going to die, out of the blue—I was enchanted.

A curt, straight voice, but a concerned expression: "Here, take a HP potion, it'll restore your health. Tastes like mushrooms, right?" That was Haruka-kun. One of my classmates that no one ever talked to. A boy who was always alone.

My world changed. A monotone world of inevitable death was completely transformed. All of my classmates were smiling. And I was, too.

There was a big fuss. Soon my life became such chaos that I didn't even have the time to feel sad or scared anymore. It was all smiles and anger, shockingly delicious food, a wonderful inn, lovely baths. I was able to smile again before I knew it.

I thought that there would be nothing but misery for me, that any happiness was over. But now I was staying in a room better than I had ever seen and relaxing in equally gorgeous baths. Every day I ate food better than anything I'd ever eaten before. All of the happiness in the old world that I thought I had lost was back in my grasp. It was overwhelming.

Now that I was staying in a luxury inn of sorts, I began to rediscover the things I had given up on. The inn reminded me that I could be happy here.

That night, I slept soundly for the first time since coming here. A lot had happened, but every day was joyful now. Even if I remembered my family and wanted to cry, I could still be happy each and every day. I had the conviction to live.

At least until the day that Haruka-kun disappeared.

He went away. He went alone, saying it was too dangerous for the rest of us. He might've met a horrible fate for our sake, died for our sake—he might already have been dead. I had no choice but to live, if only for his sacrifice.

The world would turn monochrome once more. The days of despair would sweep back. The days of shivering, waiting for death. That's what I thought, at least.

But he came back, smiling as always, like it was no big deal. I was relieved, so relieved, but I heard from Kakizaki-kun and his friends about what really happened. Really—how did he put on a smile after what he had just gone through?

His arm, torn off his body. His stomach, riddled with stab wounds. His legs, cut and severed. His face, half-burned off.

His body like a sieve. His pain must have been worse than death. The mere act of taking a breath must have been enough to bring his whole body to the verge of collapse.

Kakizaki-kun and his friends understood how he had gotten in such a state, because they would protect us until they ended up similarly punctured all over. But Haruka-kun had Revival and looked the same as ever. At least on the surface.

I shouldn't have been relieved. But he put on a normal face and laughed so that I could. He must've suffered unbearable pain to show us a simple smile.

The next day, he was fighting again. Alone, again, without telling anyone, without even getting the chance to restore his MP. And yet he

fought. He protected us, *again*.

Then he went missing in the Ultimate Dungeon, enthralled the Dungeon Emperor, and everything else. So, we could laugh, we could smile, smile as we squirmed. All we could do was fight, and we had to try—and if it wasn't good enough, we had to get better. To protect him. We couldn't give up, no matter how hard it was.

Today's efforts weren't good enough, either. But there Haruka-kun was, with that nasty, ugly smile. That horrible smile that praised us for doing our best. That reminded us of how hard we tried.

Everyone would smile again today…and go bankrupt again today. The nastiest kind of prize, but one guaranteed to leave us with sweet dreams. That smile assured me he had something in store. *I may sink today, but I'll rise again tomorrow. I won't give up.* He was the only one with an evil smile like that.

I was scared of war, to be honest. The idea of killing other people terrified me. But I just had to remind myself of how much scarier it was to lose people.

"Welcome, welcome, Shield Girl. I've got some really good stuff for you today, made really good stuff, ya hear? I'm telling ya, it's a bargain. A bargain that'll make me rich, but still a bargain. So how about you jump on it? How about it?"

That terrible, terrible smile.

I resigned myself to becoming Shield Girl for that smile. *I'll become everyone's shield,* I decided. I wouldn't let anyone else get hurt. I'd had enough of waiting; I couldn't have anyone hurt. You could call it selfish. I really was protecting myself by doing this…but I didn't want to lose anyone. That's why I took up the mantle of Shield Girl. To protect everyone. Today might have been a failure, but I'd fight again tomorrow.

Until everyone is safe, I'll keep fighting. Because I'm Shield Girl. Because I can!

"New products?!"

"Yaaaaaay! Gimme! Whatever it is, I'll take three!"

"What is it, what is it?"

“Hey, why are you giving Shield Girl first dibs?!”

Everyone was going to be bankrupt before the day was out, apparently. I couldn’t protect the rest of the girls from that evil grin.

That evil grin kept us safe. I still had more to do. *I’ll laugh more today, feel happy…and go bankrupt all over again?*

DAY 58

EVENING

Bubbly beaming bubble bath braying girls don't know jack about mushroom juice.

THE WHITE LOSER INN

GIRLS' MEETING

UNABLE TO WAIT FOR DINNER, we surged into the bath. We'd have to take another bath later after training, of course. But for now: bath!

"Ahhhh, between the sticky slime *and* the smell, today was seriously the worst."

"My body's sticky, but my equipment and clothes are just dripping."

"To add insult to injury, I saw Haruka-kun, grinning that evil grin, making a sign for a special rip-off cleaning service for 2,000 ele per item."

"He's way overcharging!"

"Let's get in on it!"

None of us wanted to touch that sticky liquid. Haruka-kun wouldn't have to touch it with his own hands, and he had plenty of detergent made. Above all, he could fix things, so I was sure he would fix up our clothes no problem. I assumed everyone would pay up for his cleaning services.

Hearing about his exceptionally nasty grin, though…he was definitely thinking of something sordid! He'd caught an eyeful earlier!

"I never expected the tentacles to come up from underground!"

"And so many of them!"

"I'm sorry, I wasn't expecting to have to counterattack the roots at a moment's notice."

We'd reflected on what happened on our way back to the inn. A lot went wrong—firstly, that nobody checked to see if there was anything

underground. We had a long way to go.

“But how could we have known? It’s fine!”

“Wild that he worked out the root of the problem at all, IMO!”

“Yes, grand prize to him!”

The dungeon boss had roots underground that restored its MP. So, when we cut the roots…they rose out of the ground, surrounding us with dripping soaking wet slime and instantly destroying our formation.

“But he just…burned it?”

“Yeah, the whole idea was that we couldn’t do it with magic.”

Unexpected, unexpectable events destroyed us. We had failed.

“Do we need to work on our imagination?”

“What did he say? Even dummies know you can just burn it with oil if magic’s not an option? Just check out these ten easy steps?”

“He got that from some self-help book, huh?”

“I never thought of that.”

I mean, he could try and pawn it off on some self-improvement guru all he wanted—it was all Haruka-kun’s idea. Still, he was right that this was a blind spot for us. Perhaps you could call it a lack of imagination. Since magic wouldn’t work for burning the plants, we assumed it couldn’t be burned. Even though Haruka-kun had brought up doing exactly that before, it didn’t come to mind at the time. It was so obvious, too! We all came from a world that didn’t have magic.

So, when he scolded us about not thinking of it, we were all surprised. Both that it was the solution and that we didn’t think of it ourselves.

“Ugh, failing sucks, but I’m still happy!”

“This is awesome!”

We did fail, but we still got a prize. It came at a hefty price, so we didn’t have a lot, but it was a happy, happy prize. Haruka-kun’s new product: “Bubbly Body Soap.” Everyone was having a blast washing themselves with it.

“My skin feels so smooth now!”

“This is what they mean by ‘baby soft!’”

“Is this seriously *my* skin?!”

Everyone bubbled themselves up in the luxuriously bubbly bubble-bath body soap. Our skin was as slippery and gleaming as it could possibly be. It had to be better than the most expensive soap back in Japan. It smelled nice, too, and using it left my skin moist and soft. It was like I’d been reborn. I assumed it was created out of the finest ingredients this world had to offer—mushrooms. Body soap made out of mushrooms… Was that the least likely luxury imaginable, or what? We each got one bar per person and had the best bath time of our lives.

Angelica-san beamed and brayed along with us, but she didn’t seem surprised by the soap. She must’ve gotten to use the prototype. *And definitely in jacuzzi sex!*

“This is an unbelievably high-end product. The ingredients are top-class, and it was made with alchemy, too.”

“Thank god, thank god!”

Our hair was silky smooth now, and everyone’s skin was glossy and seductively soft. My own skin felt like a newborn baby’s to the touch. We laughed and washed each other and frolicked in the bath. We had been down after discussing the failed battle, but now we were in ridiculously high spirits. Forced into happiness, once again.

“Whoa, my hair is smooth, too!”

“My hair got so frazzled when I got shocked by electricity, but now it’s totally fixed!”

“It’s like I’m wearing someone else’s skin! It feels so youthful!”

“This is what smooth skin truly means.”

“This is soap for models!”

Everyone looked beautiful, with clear, gorgeous skin.

“I *need* this soap! I don’t care how much I get ripped off!”

“Yep, no other soap will do!”

“Him giving us free samples was a trap!”

We reflected, felt bad, and had training later…but since getting all sweaty and ruining our perfect skin would be such a waste, we decided to have a meeting. The subject of which was me. How to act as commander—whether I should keep going as I had been, as in fighting on the frontlines, or if I should stay back, gather information, and strategize.

We discussed which option would be best of the so-called two styles of leadership. I was worried my strategies might get overly complicated.

“No, they’re totally fine!”

“Yeah, even with multiple commanders we’ll still listen to you in the end.”

“We need to think before we battle anyways.”

“Yeah!”

We couldn’t make a decision by the time we finished our bath, and when we walked into the dinner hall—it was bargain sale city. A trap more dangerous than the rafflesia. The culprit’s evil sneer was fully affixed, which meant that the nice, protective boy from the dungeon was gone—that smile was pure evil!

“Sorry for the wait. Anklet bargain sale!” he called. “Enchantments include High-Speed Movement and Evasion. And then, the grand prize of this evening—stylish item bags!”

“Excuuuuse me?”

He had launched the grand premier of several new items specifically designed to devastate teenage girls!

“Gimme nooooooow!”

“This is so cute! You can literally wear it with anything!”

“Yeah, cute outfits kind of go to waste when you’ve got a giant sword on, y’know?”

“Good price, good value. You know? Queen Bee criticizes my bags, but these are different! They’re strong enough to repel the Seven Gods of Fortune, and they even come in two types: messenger bag and

shoulder bag! They're masterpieces, so winner takes all, now go to town—*ahhhhhh!"*

"Gaaaaaahhh!"

Simultaneous maiden coordination wiped Haruka out. Not a single anklet remained. He'd really fanned the flames with the whole 'winner takes all' thing, so he had no right to be surprised.

I was sure he'd made plenty of them, anyhow. But you see, no matter how many items you could fit in your current bag, a cute one-of-a-kind bag would motivate any girl to go to war. It was the most dangerous thing to dangle in front of us!

"St-stop! Help meeeeeeeeeeee!"

"That belongs to me! Hands off!"

"I'll try on this one here!"

"I want them all!"

"How can I decide? If I let go for a second, someone else will take it! But I can't choose!"

Everything disappeared under the trampling maidens. Haruka-kun could handle stampeding monsters, but a maiden stampede? No way.

"The anklets are, like, too adorbs!"

"This bag is perf!"

"They're all masterpieces! Look at that flashy design, too."

"I want 'em all!"

The girls exhibited their rampaging SPE and devastating POW. The rafflesia wouldn't have stood a chance against us in this charge. We needed the power of bargain sales! *But seriously, that's mine, don't you dare take it, I won't let you have it— Protect!*

"Look at that blue one! Wait, no, don't look!"

"I need it—go, Jump!"

"I won't let you! Step!"

Everyone began activating their skills. It was degenerating into a magic battle. I wanted to get to the register (Haruka-kun) as fast as possible, but he was bobbing in the sea of rampaging maidens. I caught occasional glimpses of his face, but he was getting swallowed, flattened, and squashed in the stampede, and without the register, there was no way to end it. The conflict intensified, sending Haruka-kun spiraling and jerking away from us —just how far was he going to go?

"Where's the register?!"

"I just saw him here!"

"This battle isn't over until you pay!"

"That's mine!"

"Raaaaaaaaah!"

No one lost much HP, but plenty of spirits were broken by the vicious merry-go-round of bodies, including Haruka-kun. Unable to escape even with Vibration magic, he had gotten swallowed up and crushed again. *Come on, where is he?* Did he sink?

He appeared gasping for air. "Getting sunk in a sea of teenage girl bodies has sent my sex appeal straight to heaven. If it springs up from the dead it's gonna be a serious public safety hazard! Come on, step on me, ladies! I'm begging you!"

There he was, and the smug smirk was wiped straight off his face. Seriously, Haruka-kun, let me pay you already. This stampede won't end until you stop letting yourself get crushed in it, do you understand?

DAY 58

EVENING

Someone is dead, and you're talking about a new life rather than just using Resuscitate?!

THE WHITE LOSER INN

HINDSIGHT BIAS: a psychological phenomenon where people tend to perceive past events as more predictable than they actually were. With that in mind, I should've just kept my "Cloak?" the entire time. I didn't have any way to escape in my ordinary leather boots!

"Aaaaaaaghhhhhhh!"

Right now, I was experiencing a festival of sleazebag hindsight bias. I should've known that my bargain sale would cause an outbreak of stampeding, lightly clothed girls. And I was feeling *everything!*

"I want the anklet, but I *also* want the bag with the charm *oh my god* it is so cute!"

"Ugh, I want everything!"

"That's why the bags have skills," I gasped, coming up for air. "They'll also give you a speed boo—mmmmmfgghh!"

Some soft object just completely crushed and muffled me. When I tried to move it rubbed against me. I was so totally trapped and squished in between bodies that I couldn't even use Airwalk to escape!

"The bags have all sorts of resistances, so they last long, but who needs that?"

"Outfits just need a TPO—time, place, and occasion! That's all!"

"Meanwhile, I'm getting a lot of Turbulent Pressure Obscuring my—*grooomph*!"

"We're not that heavy!!"

I got a single breath of air, but couldn't deploy Life or Death before the buoyant, bouncy, round, ever-rubbing bodies buried me and suffocated me. Holy shit, I could feel *everything*…this was too much for a teenage boy. These light pajamas were way too dangerous.

My bubbly body soap had done its job, by the way. The girls' skin was glistening, smooth, and sweet-smelling; moisturized and soft, too. Not even accounting for some of the soft parts pressed against me! Should I be suffering right now, or rejoicing? *No, just escaping!*

"Ohhh em geee, I tooootally dig this red shoulder bag!"

Squish squish.

"No, but they're in all different colors, so you gotta focus on the shape and size!"

Smush squish smush.

Rub rub.

"Squishing, smushing, *aaand* rubbing?! This is too much! That much power could only have one source—well, two, actually!"

Before I had time to think, soft masses of flesh surrounded me. Pressing in on me, drowning me, crushing me. I felt way too much! At this rate my Sensitivity would hit Level Max. I was at risk of overflowing!

What could I do to escape? Anything besides Super Horny and Alpha Male! I definitely couldn't use those!

"Oh, I've got it! Blockhead! But…I can't use that, well, because it's Blockhead? Or I'm a Blockhead? Mmffgh?"

"He seems to be dying?"

"Hm… His HP is fine so there's no need to use Resuscitate, but he might need Fresh Start or something?"

"He looks happy…"

"I don't have any magic that can give him a fresh start! Why does he look so happy, anyway?"

"I guess he can't handle mosh pits?"

“He *is* in a mosh pit with a group of level 99 high school girls, far above his power in every category. Unequipped, too.”

Grrfmfmghfmfff! What was this abuse? A poor innocent scam artist, trampled in a teen girl mosh pit. What a travesty! This teenage boy wasn’t prepped for this kind of party, but was still getting rubbed and smushed by soft and bouncy and pressure-y things from every which way. Show some compassion, ladies. This position held unique dangers for a boy my age!

“Hellooooo, are you alliiiiive?”

Smush smush.

Despite all the smushing and rubbing, at least I didn’t have any injuries. The problem was that I was facing a total wall of pressure, destroyed by the immense level gap between our POW stats. That was my weak point—but how could I have known it’d be my downfall in the ultimate teenage girl bargain sale stampede of all time?

Eventually, Book Club President noticed me. I had been wondering if she was causing this stampede on purpose. Not for the sake of smush-squish services, not at all, but to expose and exploit my weaknesses. Maybe even explode them. How could I have thought I was getting stronger? I was still only level 20!

POW was one weakness, and getting smushies from girls in thin clothes was another. If they had their weapons and armor on, I would’ve died. That really would have exposed my weakness. Book Club President, thank you. Thank you for this squishing, smushing, stampeding mosh pit. It was truly a wonderful experience. It felt beyond good—it was a complete crushing envelopment into soft female bodies! It was like sleeping with my head in their laps! Thank you, Book Club President! Huh?

“Aw, has he never put his head in someone’s lap before?”

“Hee hee hee!”

Everyone knew how weak I was at level 20. That was why they were struggling to get stronger, to protect me. My fatal, hopeless weakness was understood on a fundamental level. But now they really saw it firsthand: how a simple situation could, in fact, kill me. The schemer behind this was trying to demonstrate to the other girls how someone’s weaknesses could be

used against them with a simple human strategy. And that it was possible for them to protect me, too. This was her plan. She *really* worked me over!

Crushed by Book Club President's secret maneuvers, I was left totally exposed. Now the girls would try even harder to get stronger. They lost everything when they came to this world less than two months ago. How could they have bounced back from that? That pressure would be enough to shatter the hardest of human hearts.

This strategy could crush me even if Miss Armor Rep was around, with her devastating offense, firepower, and pride. Overwhelm me, crush me with such a massive force that it would be impossible to overcome it with speed. No matter how unbelievably strong Miss Armor Rep was, I was as frail as a doll; she couldn't protect me from everything. This was one strategy she definitely couldn't protect me from.

"You keep talking about that maiden crap. Isn't this embarrassing for you? I mean, *I'm* seriously embarrassed…not that I'm actually embarrassed, but really, some kind of bare-assed embarrassing thing is kind of going on in here, y'know? To be totally real, this is hot."

So long as the threat around us wasn't deadly enough to actually kill us, then we could—hm, well, was that seriously her strategy? A human shield? Miss Armor Rep and I could always use the rest of our classmates as human shields and run over the enemy. That must legit be what Book Club President was thinking of. She must've come up with it from some historical example—to become a human shield for me before I could get killed. She was always such a worrywart, looking unnecessarily far ahead all the time.

"Get away from us, you creep!"

"You can't touch us!"

"That's sexual harassment!"

She must have been concerned about the upcoming war. That was the biggest danger to me, so she was stressed. The girls were getting run ragged. They were near their limit. Normal people could never spend their days fighting monsters, much less train to kill other humans on the side. The nerds and meatheads weren't normal, but the girls were—was this way too much for them?

“Hey, you’re the ones stampeding and smushing me with your soft skin, I can’t not touch you! I’m the one being touched, if anything! Who’s sexually harassing who, eh? Hang on, since when were you a classmate?”

A new character had appeared. And even though I didn’t do anything wrong, I was being accused of sexual harassment. *Why am I always the bad guy?*

“These are sooo presh!”

“I’m so glad I’m bankrupt!”

“Oh, I *so* get it!”

“Let’s make more money tomorrow, girls!”

“Yeah!”

I finished taking their orders and the girls put their anklets on. Some girls even put on stockings and fishnet tights for the occasion. What a magnificent view. The air was getting a bit thin up here for high school boys. Kind of hard to breathe, right? *C’mon, say something!*

“Good craftsmanship, too.”

“And a first-rate design!”

“We would never be able to afford something like this back in Japan.”

“Thought so!”

I guess being breathless was inevitable for a teenage boy with this kind of scenery. I mean, the girls were sitting down, pulling up their skirts to the tops of their thighs and showing off their anklets to one another, then trying on whatever was next in their piles. *It’s an endless onslaught of stocking and knee-sock wrapped thighs!*

I’ll preserve these images forever, I thought. Not in my memory—in Jupiter Eye, naturally. Turns out I had made some truly beautiful things. Who cared about the skills and effects on ’em?

“Let’s go have a fashion show in my room!”

“Shimazaki-san, can you coordinate my outfit?”

It was a good night, and it seemed it might get better. My teenage boy soul was raging against its prison, desperate to be let free. And rage free it would, late at night tonight…I mean, you know? Because a red cheongsam was waiting for me tonight! Anklets included! And then I would rage, rage free, and *very very very* hard!

"Thanks Haruka-kun!"

I made a big reserve stock of stylish item bags, now sold out, which the girls carried back to their rooms. Leather bags weren't good enough for them for dungeon-raiding, obviously, because the messenger bags that I made for dungeons were sold out too.

"Does it really make sense to wear a messenger bag with a sword and armor?" I asked.

"Why not ask yourself that *before* selling it?!"

"I guess the monsters will be the only ones that see it."

Just keep it between us that I planned to rip them off with Storage Cloaks next. There was no end in sight to my profiteering. And the night was young!

DAY 59

MORNING

That'll fix things without bothering anyone! Nice, swift, and good for the environment.

THE WHITE LOSER INN

I GOT A MESSAGE from the duke's palace first thing in the morning, this time with Royal Girl's maid included. After sharing information with Stalker Girl's clan, they'd triangulated the source of the war.

Yup, a conflict born out of the most stupid, idiotic, pointless foppery and sheer boredom that they dared to elevate to a civil war.

"Got it, let's capture the nobles and royal family, give 'em swords, and make 'em fight to the death! Boom, solved, that'll fix things without bothering anyone with a civil war or anything like that. Nice, swift, and good for the environment, and once they're all dead we'll be super-duper briskly, brightly, refreshingly refreshed at the murder of every last one of them."

"How is that good for the environment?!"

"Not spirited enough? A death game isn't harsh enough, so we should feed them to mean girls?! Now that's a terrifying fate! I wouldn't want to watch."

"We're not cannibals, and anyway, why would you watch that?! Why are we terrifying monsters in your story?! And since when did I evolve into a queen?! I'm not a mean girl boss! We're not freakin' mean girls in the first place! *How many times do I have to tell you!*"

"Seriously, remember our names!"

"Why do our statuses all still say, 'Mean Girl'?!"

"I never evolved into a Queen, okay! You forget our names, treat us like monsters, and force me to evolve on top of all that?! Just shut! The! Hell! *Up!*"

She was totally correct. I was wrong. She wouldn't actually evolve until she got to level 100! Maybe level 100 was the level wall for evolution? Although, the mean girls would easily bite through any wall in their way. They were glaring at me right now like they were going to bite my head off! Didn't they know the real bad guys here were nobles and kings? I was just an innocent little loner who didn't do anything wrong.

"War's war, but I don't think the nobles or royals would exactly agree to that…"

"Yeah, the survivor wouldn't exactly be happy about it."

"We're talking about a power struggle here, though, so they should keep any complaints to themselves. A fight to the death would get everyone else out unscathed, which means no problems for us. I mean, if they want to fight and die, why should anyone else get involved?"

I wouldn't stop them from doing that. In fact, I would cheer on their efforts and laugh at the loser's dead body.

"So long as they don't involve other people, I don't care if the royals and nobles kill one another. They should just do that, y'know? I mean, that's problem solved, world evolved. Am I right?"

If the people who actually wanted to kill were the ones who killed and got killed, then I couldn't care less. But getting others involved in a war—that was a real nuisance. If they wanted to cut out the middlemen and kill each other, then hey, I say go to town. Have a blast.

"I have a report," announced Stalker Girl. "The main force is an alliance between the church faction nobles' army and the kingdom's army led by the first prince. They have called themselves the 'Frontier Reclamation Army.' They have demanded the head of the traitor Duke Omui along with the dungeon treasures and repayment of all standing spellstone debts. Nearly a third of the kingdom's total military might has joined, including forces from small local lords around the kingdom."

That was the news. Nothing for us to be concerned about, then. Pretty cheesy, in the end. They wanted Mr. Meridad's head and the dungeon treasure—to subjugate the frontier again. If they'd asked for Mr. Meridad's head as their sole demand, that'd be all well and good—I had Revival

Mushrooms. But they wanted the dungeon treasure, too. That was actually pretty bold of them.

They were bottomless wells of dullness, stupidity, and ignorance, but I had to give them credit. It was a gutsy demand.

"Why do you look so impressed?!"

"Well, if they want the dungeon treasure, the Ultimate Dungeon treasure is none other than Miss Armor Rep, right? And from the other dungeons, that would include Slimey, too. They've got a nerve asking for those two."

"Good point."

The whole kingdom would go extinct in a wink. Capital, kingdom, or empire, those two presents would wipe 'em all out. The pair of them had been happily gobbling up hamburgers all morning, but if you looked at them as what they were—weapons—then they were the most dangerous, destructive, deadly combo of presents you could possibly ask for in this world.

"I mean, normally some part of you is always desperately cleaving to life, even if you do have a death wish. But they're just diving right into the abyss! Guess they really want the world to end?"

Just thinking about the sheer power of those two was a bit frightening. Kind of made it feel like a miracle that this world still existed. But those kings and nobles—they wanted to end it, I guess?

"Inconsiderate."

"And incompetent?"

"Incoherent and inaccurate too. That's a grand slam right there."

"Angelica-san and Slimey are a threat to the whole world; they would destroy everything while a certain incredible, insufferable, inhumane guy just stands there with an inexplicable smile on his face."

"Yeah, I think they'd almost be happier just killing each other in a fight to the death."

Even if they got their hands on some quality equipment from the frontier, I heard that their levels weren't even all that high. Royal Girl was

strong, but she was supposed to be the strongest standout in the entire kingdom. And she was about on par with the other girls after some hardcore training, sooo…?

"Angelica-san and Slimey alone would be more enough to destroy the entire enemy force, but throw in Haruka-kun and he could destroy them psychologically, too."

Nod nod.

Jiggle jiggle!

We were talking about a vicious enemy invasion. Instead, they had targeted an innocent teenage boy!

"I've read all of the heroic legends of the kingdom's church, but even a hero protected by god would go down from one blink of his evil eye before they could use an Instant Kill attack."

"He made god sit down and *apologize!* That evil eye could kill anyone who picked a fight with him!"

I thought everyone was worried about my safety, but now they seemed to have made a U-turn, and I was getting roasted left and right? Burnt to a crisp!

"H-how dare you reference a heroic legend only to throw in a diss at the end! And the only time I killed someone by looking at them was when they used Instant Kill on me and it reflected back on them! I didn't kill them with a glance! I'm innocent!"

"…"

They totally ignored me! After that, they went back to discussing the report. Apparently, the enemy force had entered battle formations and preparations and even set up an expeditionary force, all without any strategy whatsoever.

"They have to worry about information leaking, too."

"They could have a top-secret plan?"

"No, there wouldn't be anything that Stalker Girl's clan didn't know about or that Shillyshally hadn't heard of."

They had no strategy, and no secret weapon either.

“What about the airships they sent over the mountains?”

“I was looking forward to those, but I suppose they ran out. Those were the last of the balloon bats.”

“So, they’re preparing solely for the sake of plundering the domain?”

Could anyone blame me? Flying was every teenage boy’s fantasy! I wanted an airship! But there weren’t any more?

I guess there was a meeting or something going on, to discuss strategy or countermeasures or whatever. But seriously, what were those fools thinking?

“To go to war, obviously!”

“No, but I mean, like, their objective? I remember the war part, we literally just talked about it, so how could I forget? What were we talking about?”

I had no idea what the military was trying to pull. Whatsoever.

“So, they’re just…advancing on us? That’s all?”

“Yeah, like a normal large-scale invasion…”

“No, no, you see, that means they don’t have any way to get across the pseudo-dungeon. So, no matter how much I look, I just can’t figure out what they’re actually coming for…”

“Yeah, an army wouldn’t have an easy time getting through the pseudo-dungeon.”

The kingdom forces were already at a disadvantage, since the frontier merely had to defend itself. Not to mention our advantage in terms of numbers, quality of equipment, and level. And levels were what mattered for using equipment skills too.

“We tried, but we learned nothing,” Stalker Girl said.

“Nothing?”

So, they came to do nothing? That meant they had no strategy. They were just walking at us, in other words. Why did I feel like that wouldn’t get them very far?

“If they’ve gotta walk that far, maybe I should open up a shoe store. That’ll be a hit! Ooh, or a souvenir shop in front of the pseudo-dungeon…”

“Why would you do that?!”

Maybe some pennants with “frontier” written on them? You know, the standard triangle ones? Because that was all the kingdom would be heading home with.

“Thinking about it, there’s not much they *can* do, right?”

“There’s no information for us to form a counterstrategy, so let’s stop here and get to dungeon raiding,” said Class Rep.

“Agreed!”

“Yeah, we’re gonna pass today, no matter what!”

“That dungeon boss is going down!”

They wouldn’t pass today either if they didn’t get their heads straight. Getting through three dungeons was too much, but we might manage two. Dungeons were the fastest road to better equipment. And who knew how long it would take to get to level 100? The best we could do was keep fighting through dungeons to earn money, better equipment, and whatever experience we could get.

We were well-prepared, so I didn’t anticipate any issues, especially since all I needed to do was roll around and whack stuff with my staff if I got into a pinch.

DAY 59

MORNING

Napoleon was just a famous complainer, in the end.

DUNGEON

40TH FLOOR

THEIR SWORDS AND SPEARS gleamed, their shields and armor clanking and clanging—pretty impressive, considering they were monkeys. Welp, no room for regret, no place for pride. We had the meatheads on our side, after all, and they were even stupider than monkeys. The meatheads would definitely lose in a test of knowledge! Heck, the goblins would be a close match!

"Shut the hell up!"

"FIRE! Three times, then charge!"

A dense rain of arrows rose into the air as my classmates charged with more force than ever. The monkeys stared up at the arrows, shrieking, but they were too late. There were a lot of them, but they were no army.

Class Rep had eliminated the pause between firing the arrows and launching the charge, speeding up the process considerably. She set the strategy in advance, so there was no need for a pause in the first place. Even with a more flexible strategy, she still insisted on planning key elements in advance, eliminating lag time. Now that the monkeys were scattered, it was over. It was all over.

"Middle ranks, weapon swap, go!"

"Jaaaa!"

Everyone had item bags; all the better to easily switch equipment. The central vanguard had all been equipped with large shields, while the mid-guard had halberds. As always, I stayed up all night making them so I could rip off the girls in the morning. The millionaire lifestyle leaves no time for rest!

“Rearguard, advance! Stay in formation!”

“Jaaaah!”

The vanguard charged for the monkeys. By the time two or three parties had stormed their way to the monkeys, the battle was over. There were certainly risks associated with close combat, but because the tactics were so seamless, we had the decisive upper hand. The strategy was short but forceful, left no time for thought, and bulldozed the enemy into confusion before they had time to react. Too complex for either monkeys or meatheads to understand.

“Scatter and finish them off! Stick with your parties!”

“Jaaaah!”

It was an aggressive, intimidating strategy that wiped out the enemy regardless of their strengths and weaknesses. The class had been too thoughtful before now, but they had learned to match their aggression to their decisiveness, and coolly blazed through the enemy ranks without fear of failure. That was Mistress Class Rep-sama at work. We didn’t need a general behind the scenes. With Mistress Class Rep-sama to command them, those kids were a class of warriors to be reckoned with… *Hang on, what about me? Am I not a part of the class anymore?!*

“It’s over, they’re all gone.”

“Same here.”

“Time for a short break, but let’s pick up the spellstones first.”

“All right!”

The level 40 armed monkeys left behind a bunch of equipment. I couldn’t use any of it, but I could sell it for huge profits. The girls were more than happy to give me money for stuff yesterday…but there was more! *I’ll rip them off tonight, too, with my new line of mini cheongsam, now that I have a mass-produced stock!* I, er, ended up making way too many.

“I’ve just confirmed with everyone, no injuries.”

“We’ve also finished gathering all the spellstones (pocket change) and weapons (sweet prizes).”

Dominance. The opponent was a group of armed monkeys, but they had no leadership, and no strategy. There's a saying about how a hundred wolves led by a sheep lost to a group of a hundred sheep led by a wolf. That's impossible, but the same guy who said that also said "impossible" isn't in the dictionary. He was just a famous complainer in the end.

My point: a group of monkeys led by monkeys had no chance against a group of high school students led by Mistress Class Rep-sama. Hell, even the meatheads, who were way dumber than sheep, did their jobs. Even if the meatheads went around whacking the monkeys with their boomerangs, we'd be okay. Well, maybe that was too far. If they kept that up, I'd happily swap them out for sheep.

"Now everyone, gather around. Haruka-kun, is there a secret chamber?"

"Nope, not a single one since the 37th floor. Without profits there's no scamming, no scheming, and no monopolizing, so be careful with your spending, 'kay?"

"He's going to monopolize *more* products?"

"Yep, he hasn't reflected on his actions at all. He needs another lecture!"

"Why does he literally buy up everything?!"

"Swapping a few things among friends is one thing, but you can't trust anyone in business!"

That was the mystery. Obviously, you wouldn't lend money to people without security. But taking the risk was part of the whole point of investing, so I was going around signing contracts with high interest rates to mitigate that risk. If just three out of ten ventures went well, I'd break even, which meant *super*-high interest rates. When I hit ten for ten, it'd be a different story. Plus, I was raking in as many sales as I could regardless of how well my ventures went. And all my clients kept offering their thanks and groveling even though I was ripping them off like crazy. They often tried to pay back even more than they owed. They were all hard workers, so they paved more land than agreed on, built more factories, and further improved the distribution of goods, which made it easier for me to invest more. Wash, rinse, repeat, profit.

I didn't get it at all. The people here finally had money. You'd think they'd want to buy more things, but they kept on working! The development showed no signs of stopping. Even the duke was like that.

We needed dungeon items for that reason. With those stupidly good-natured imbeciles protecting the domain, they needed more weapons. A surplus never hurt anyone. With the people of the domain paying back more than they owed, they deserved all the protection in the world. I was willing to finance their development, no matter the risk. The profits we were pulling in were literally worth risking our lives for.

"On to the next."

"All right!"

"We didn't like, forget anyone, riiight? Where's wittle Haruka-chan?"

"I'm here."

"Then let's go!"

"Yeah!"

Our commanding officer issued an order to move. But why did they check to make sure I was there every time? It wasn't like I fell into holes on every single floor. I wasn't going anywhere. Well, if I wasn't there, it probably *would* be because I fell into a hole, but I hadn't. I was present and in one piece and everything. They treated me like a forgotten object. Apparently, I needed some way to stand out more and boost my charisma, but I was too ordinary to be appealing anyway.

We went on to fight the 48th floor, which was no problem for our class. Miss Armor Rep and Slimey had advanced from Tokyo Tower to the Great Pyramids. *In cat's cradle, of course.*

I mean, I tried it. It was pretty fun. It was getting trendy during the girls' meetings lately, or so I heard. Don't tell the resident S&M specialist Class Rep that I brought string. That would go in the wrong sort of direction in her hands. Or actually, the exact right direction.

"I thought she was going to end up royalty in this world, and instead she's into bondage. What a twist!"

Jiggle jiggle.

“All enemies have been exterminated! Once you get all the spellstones, take a short break.”

“Roger!”

She issued orders elegantly. But last night, she was all tied up in string from *there* to *there*, wearing *that* with nothing but *that* on her *this*, and me-oh-my, did she ever love *that*, but there she was, elegantly issuing orders. And now she was glaring at me! How did she notice my thoughts? Look, Miss Armor Rep told me *everything* in excruciating detail from last night. It was a given that I’d end up picturing it. It was hard on me, too! It sounded like Class Rep was the one getting pawed in a cat’s cradle! She wore *tortoise shell binding*! *Shit, I really can’t picture this anymore…*

I thought that Class Rep was an S wielding her whip and all, but apparently last night she went into full M-mode. Why does she get to multiclass? *I don’t even have one!*

“I’m not thinking anymore, so it’s over. I swear! I wanted to see but I *didn’t* see so it’s just my imagination. So, I’m innocent! I didn’t do anything wrong. How could a teenage boy not imagine a fellow teenage girl in tortoise shell binding? That’s a shocking image for a high schooler, no lie—ack, stop! No, don’t hurt me! That whip is dangerous!”

Phantasmagoric pouting rage transcended the speed of sound—the whip pounded in my direction. Since when did Class Rep excel in both power and punishment?!

“*Rraaaaaagh!”*

“I’m sorry! I’ll stop! Please don’t glare at me and attack me with your whip! That is an extremely dangerous weapon! You’re hitting as hard as Miss Armor Rep. I can only dodge it with Teleport, so I nearly died! Forgive me, I beg of you!”

Getting too close to the fire was starting to singe the hairs on my body, so best to shut up for now. I mean, all I was doing was cat’s cradle, which obviously had *nothing* to do with sexy stuff. I obviously was not the bad guy here. I was a totally innocent teenage boy and *okay this topic is radioactive, so I’ll just look the other way*. She was staring at me with her whip in hand. Her face was white as winter, but if I gave her one more whit of wayward behavior that whip would lay me to waste!

DAY 59

MORNING

When I whisper my fantasies, their attacks suddenly change directions.

DUNGEON

50TH FLOOR

IN THE END, there were only two secret chambers. We found a lot of good equipment in the item drops, but nothing to write home about. They'd only be worthwhile once I upgraded them with mithril. That meant none of them were good enough to change the course of a battle. As of now, we only had two weapons that could do that. They blew everything else we had out of the water.

The first was obviously Mistress Class Rep-sama's Thunderbolt Chain Whip. The devasting brute force and destructive power of its storm made an impenetrable offensive wall. "Thunderbolt Chain Whip: All stats +70%. + ATT. Thunderbolt. Whirlwind. 100 Blows. Sky Burst. Adaptable range shifting." It was a weapon for total domination. With Class Rep's Whip Mastery skill, it was strong enough to overwhelm a dungeon boss by itself.

Then there was the nerd Guardian's halberd. Even with ordinary enchantments and mithril power-ups, it became a transcendent weapon: "Peerless Halberd: All stats +50%. Slash, bludgeon, stab attack boost (large). Storm Lash. Crash. +ATT, +DEF." It was a lashing, slashing, thrashing, and bashing great spear. Combined with skills and weapon skills, the Guardian could unleash an unending flurry of attacks. With well-honed focus, he could launch into a continuous automatic wave of blows, allowing him to overcome any enemy while barely moving a muscle.

"That combo should be basically impossible to pull off! Did he say he learned it with just regular practice?"

Nod nod.

Wiggle wiggle?!

It was an overwhelming barrage of force that operated automatically. It formed a perfect offensive wall, fused into one attack, and unleashed continuously. Altogether, the halberd was a devastating combo that didn't even rely on the user's strength. In fact, I'd never seen this particular nerd power an attack with his own strength a single time.

"Switch formations," Class Rep commanded.

"Thank you!"

"I'm running low on MP!"

Class Rep and the nerds switched places with the current vanguard to become offense and defense. With the Guardian there, he could perfectly block all incoming attacks—even those of the three-headed fire-breathing giant that happened to be the dungeon boss.

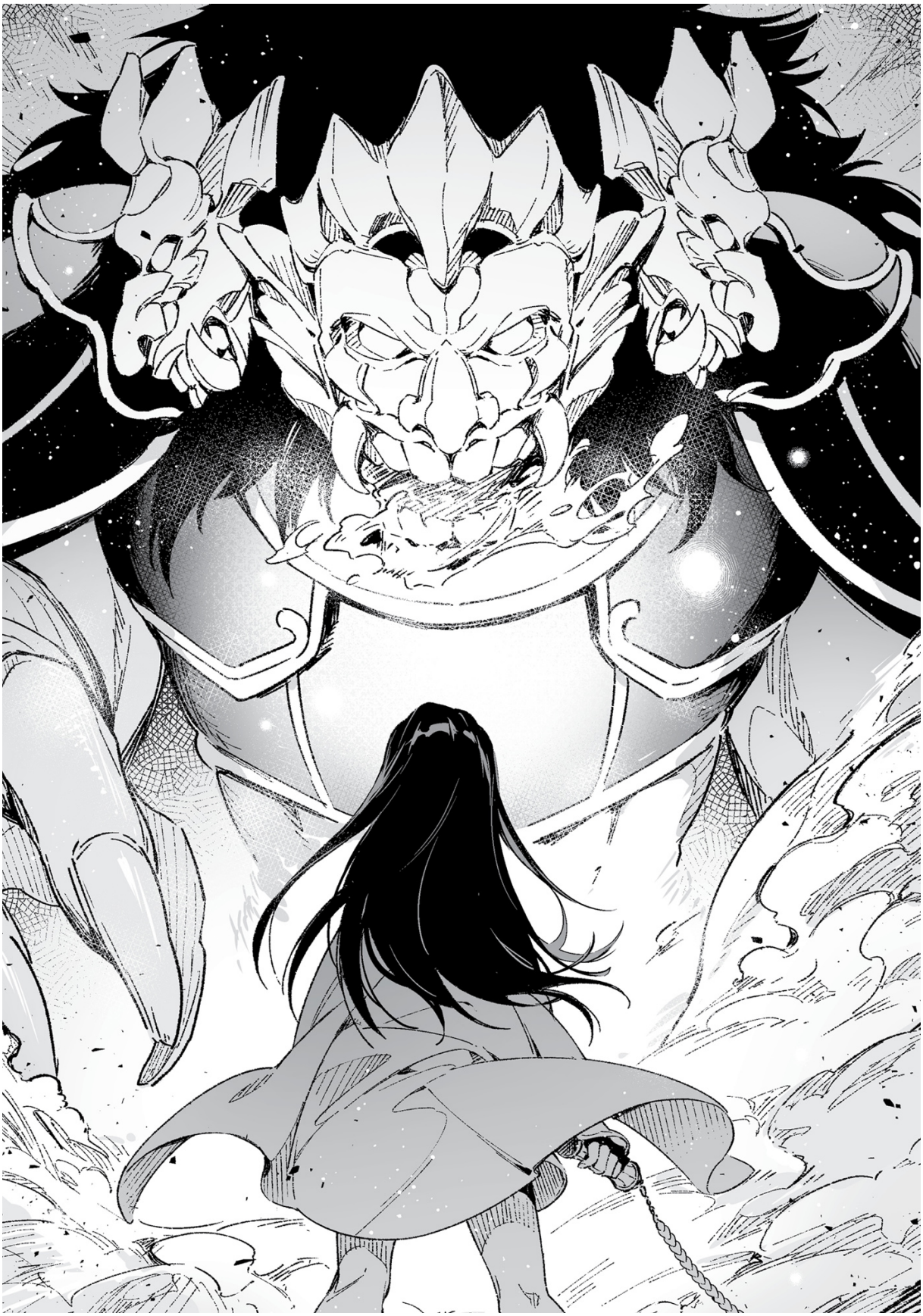
I wasn't expecting a level 100 Cacus. I went in to help, but Class Rep commanded me to remain on standby.

"I can't see his sister Caca here, so I don't mind sitting this one out. They seem to be evenly matched right now. Should I help?"

Shake shake.

Wiggle wiggle.

Still, the Cacus was dangerous. The battle was only just getting started, so they couldn't let their guard down.



“You see, in Greek mythology Cacus here is the son of the fire god Vulcan. Vulcan’s far worse than Cacus or his sister.”

He was a weird monster that Hercules killed and stole cattle from or something in the myth. Did the fact that Caca wasn’t around mean that they’d had a fight or something? Caca did betray Cacus and reveal the location of his cave to Hercules. That’d put a strain on any sibling relationship. Maybe they were fighting over succession or something. *It’s a tough otherworldly life for ol’ Cacus.*

“We’re fighting our asses off, so cut out the mythology crap!”

“Now I want to know more about Cacus’s cave garden. I can’t focus!”

They definitely couldn’t let their guard down. Meanwhile, an even tougher battle was being waged—Miss Armor Rep had defeated the Great Pyramids and gone on to Four Diamonds! I thought she’d best “fish in a dish,” but that didn’t go well, so her nimble fingers escaped through “fish’s eye” and made it all the way to “four diamonds.” It was a shocking, jiggling development for Slimey and a devastating offensive from a former dungeon emperor! Now that was unbelievable! A cat’s cradle accomplishment as magnificent as the pyramids themselves!

She had Slimey in a pinch, but what about his ten tentacles? If he unleashed everything he had, he could play cat’s cradle infinitely. We’d implemented an anti-tentacle clause for that.

Miss Armor Rep could also use Magic Hands, which she had used to develop a ten-sword style and twenty-sword style. Not that she needed ten swords—she could block anything (read: beat me up) with one. Actually, every time you read Miss Armor Rep is doing anything, assume she’s beating me up. That was the only possible outcome of going toe to toe with her, and certainly the only result I’d experienced thus far. So, translator’s note: anything Miss Armor Rep does involves beating the shit out of me. If the localization team tells you otherwise, they’re filthy liars.

Honestly, just read between the lines: everything involving me is a beating. Speaking of recent wallopings, at least last night’s bargain sale (beatdown) had been lucrative.

“He’s stumbling, attack the right flank! Defenses, advance!”

“Aaaah!”

Two of Cacus’s heads had finally come off, and the right head was teetering on the edge. They did it. He may have been level 100, but he was specialized in offense and only had Revival for defense and healing. Revival couldn’t keep up with the speed of their offensive. The relentless Inferno magic from the rear guard plus Mistress Class Rep-sama’s Thunderbolt Chain Whip scorched him to oblivion, and soon he was just an ordinary raging giant. He couldn’t do anything but rampage and roar, and soon he’d be scorched to nothing. Screaming over their inevitable victory, my classmates chipped away at Cacus.

“This could still go sideways. Right?”

Nod nod.

Jiggle jiggle.

Mistress Class Rep-sama and Nerd Guardian were still taking it relatively easy. Their attacks were dangerous, but most of the damage was coming from the other twenty-seven attackers. They chipped away at its HP slowly and had gotten it down to less than a quarter health. Two parties focused just on wounding his eyes, too, so he was totally cornered. It was an overwhelming onslaught. At the moment, the level 100 dungeon boss was faltering, dying. It was a flawless victory—well, it would have been. But, you know, that’s boring, so let’s pretend for a minute.

But hey—Miss Armor Rep had achieved the impossible! Something better than Four Diamonds?! Unbelievable—Slimey had no chance of overcoming her latest maneuver.

“We’re defeating a level 100 dungeon boss over here! Stop being more impressed with the cat’s cradle!!”

“But, but she unleashed the Great Pyramids! It was magnificent!”

“I knew Four Diamonds wouldn’t be enough.”

“You’re no good at it, Haruka-kun. ‘Fish’s Eye’ was never going to be enough. Did you think you had a shot against her?”

“Isn’t that too harsh?!”

The discussion about the dungeon boss battle had somehow turned into a discussion about cat’s cradle. Sure, I wasn’t that good, but why the

hell were they watching anyway? Didn't they have better things to do? Like, for real.

"Okay, that's enough cat's cradle. How did the dungeon boss battle go?"

"Oh no! We forgot!"

"Yeah, we were in the middle of fighting, and they started a cat's cradle battle of the century, it was way more intense than our battle with the dungeon boss!"

Mistress Class Rep-sama was angry. *Don't tell me that the trauma of being wrapped in a cat's cradle herself last night is what's triggering her?* For some reason she was unhappy with our cat's cradle showdown. If it bothered her that much, she should have said something last night. Shouldn't she have been more unhappy when she'd been writhing, torturously wrapped in tortoise shell binding, rendering herself helpless for my tortoise-shell head?

Ah! Now she's raising her whip at me!

"Yeah, we completely failed, right?"

"Maybe we should just give up."

"You know that saying about how in war or when you're on a kindergarten field trip, you should assume you're only 50 percent done when you're 90 percent done? Stay safe, be on your guard, all that stuff?" I said. "I can't wait to get home to have my nap and my snack."

"Literally *what* are you talking about? They only say that about school outings!"

"Well, it's the same thing! The trip isn't over till you get home!"

Jiggle jiggle.

Too busy focusing on snacks to think. Everyone was completely exhausted. Failure. They'd over-relied on their too-powerful weapons, and now we were flirting with going defenseless in a dungeon. *And my mind's off* that *kind of flirting now, so please put that whip away, okay?* The whip was what provoked my evil thoughts in the first place.

Seriously, why did Miss Armor Rep start whispering in my ear about the girls' secret night fight yesterday during the middle of the actual fight? I thought that Miss Armor Rep would get jealous if I thought about other girls, but instead she spoon-fed me those thoughts when I was totally off my guard! Whispering…what a devastating attack! The whispers wrapped my ear up in string, just like her chest got wrapped up last night. Miss Armor Rep kept on whispering and whispering. I couldn't exactly find relief in public. There'd be no relief at home, either—she got the best of me last night, assaulting me with astonishing force! That former dungeon emperor was more dangerous than you could ever imagine!

"Yum!"

"Whew, I'm tired."

"We couldn't have defeated it quickly, right?"

"Yeah, the risk was way too high."

"Yeah…"

But I had worked on my technique lately. I'd be back for another round. Tonight, too—I'll be ready. We were going to war again tonight—as long as I had enemies, I'd never surrender. Never quit. And she had legs that didn't quit to match.

"What are you muttering about? And why are you pumping your fist?!"

"He said he's got a soft spot for stockings."

"He also has one for knee socks. His spots all seem pretty soft!"

I prostrated myself, apologizing on all fours to a glaring, whip-wielding, teary-eyed Mistress Class Rep-sama. And despite my apologies, I had to suffer through a lecture on top of it, which I'm sure you were anticipating as much as I was. *Please don't put me on the rack!* Unfortunately for me, she held her whip away from her body, so she didn't end up accidentally tangling herself up in it in her state of distress. That was a bummer.

The girls continued their post-battle discussion with smiles and laughter, the joy and confidence of having finally defeated a level 100 dungeon boss. And they did it—they became level 100. They broke the final

level wall and gained new powers. But still, weren't they overextending themselves? Fail!

Passing meant having the strength to defeat dungeon bosses, but could they do that reliably? They had more than enough to take down a 50th floor boss. So, was the condition for leveling up to 100 defeating a level 100 dungeon boss? There were legends of level 100 heroes, which the girls had all become today…but wasn't it a bit premature to call ourselves heroes just yet?

DAY 59

DUNGEON

Their already minuscule minds vanished into pure air. There's nothing left!

50TH FLOOR

J*IGGLE JIGGLE*—the level 100 dungeon boss, Cacus the Giant, left behind a giant, top-class spellstone when it died. A drop item, too.

"It's a 'Conflagration Stone: Inferno-type magnification (hyper). Inferno. Scorch. Hellfire.' Another stone? I guess it was a fire-breathing giant, so it also has a fire drop?"

Wiggle wiggle—Slimey wanted it. Slimey always had liked rocks, and since it wasn't a gemstone, Miss Armor Rep didn't look interested.

"But I might be able to use it for a weapon… It's important for us to have powerful equipment. 'An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of manslaughter,' after all."

"It's 'worth a pound of cure!' Since when did prevention become manslaughter?!"

"He's planning to use us as his guinea pigs!"

"But if it's premeditated like that, it'll be murder and not manslaughter!"

"Well, I do wanna test it, but I don't *kill* anyone. Technically," I responded.

Everyone seemed intent on giving it to Slimey, and—oh no. He was using his baby-doll eye cuteness attack?! True, I didn't know how to use it in an item, and I doubted I could just insert it into some equipment. But a drop item from a level 100 dungeon boss would make for incredibly powerful gear…*oh no, here comes the cuteness combo attack!*

"Slimey's been a good teacher lately, so this can be his payment!"

“Yeah! Look how much he wants it!”

Jiggle jiggle jiggle!

He was dancing now. Slimey really could understand our speech. I knew he was smart, definitely an intelligent life form, but I didn’t realize he was capable of understanding language, too. If he could completely understand what we were saying, that made him at least as smart as the average human…meaning that the meatheads were over level 100 now and *still* dumber than a Slime?!

“Shut the hell up!”

“Don’t disrespect us like that!”

“Haruka-kun, anything you can’t use right away just ends up hoarded somewhere,” Class Rep said.

“And look at Slimey jiggle! He wants it so badly!”

Jiggle jiggle!

They were spoiling him! He was doing this on purpose, persuading us to give him the stone out of pure cuteness! What a tease! He was one calculating intelligent life form, playing the role of a cute pet Slime just to bend us to his will!

“Yeah, it’ll really help us in battle if Slimey gets even stronger!”

“No objections. Just look at that adorable dance!”

Jiggle jiggle, wiggle wiggle!

Nowadays he was bored, so he had conversations via strange dance with the Poster Girl. A Slime that could communicate with humans was mysterious enough, not to mention how the Poster Girl could actually understand him via weird dances herself? Yesterday they even talked via breakdancing. What the heck?

In the end, we gave Slimey the Conflagration Stone, and he thanked us with a wriggling dance. It could serve as his payment, which more than wiped out all the profit I was getting from the girls and their drop items. But never mind that—the fact that a dungeon-emperor-level Slime wanted even more power and was absorbing more skills from this stone…just how

strong did he need to be? It was a rock, so power was what he was after. He definitely wasn't eating it for the taste.

"All right, we've all recovered our health now, so let's go outside, have lunch, and then swing by one or two more dungeons," said Class Rep.

"Good idea!"

This dungeon ended at the 50th floor, and there weren't any secret chambers, so there was nothing left to do besides take the gate back up to the ground level. Some of the monsters had respawned on the upper floors, but they were all weaklings, so we could pass on the information to the guild and let the adventurers handle it.

"Bon appétit!"

"Uggggh, this runny egg is heaven!"

"Haruka, seconds!"

"Slow down enough to at least taste it!"

"You're the one standing in line for seconds while still eating your first, though?!"

The smash hit omelet rice was back for another round, after I whipped up a few tables to eat on. It was my most-requested lunch, beating out my own personal favorite, oyakodon.

"Sooo good! This is amazing!"

"It's so tasty I might start crying!"

"Seconds, prettttyy please!"

I made tables and chairs in the field outside the dungeon, and finished up a flower-pattern tablecloth in a few seconds. Everyone lined up, then I served lunch. A nice quick rip-off omelet rice festival!

"Seconds, *Twice*!"

"Re: omelet rice—thank you, family!"

The emotional reunion with omelet rice was basically a ketchup-smeared-face factory. As usual, I gave my specially prepared bucket-sized dishes to the meatheads and Slimey. They got a little confused about the fancy gold-plated design, but they dug the food, so whatever.

Jiggle jiggle!

“This is fire, friggin’ fire!”

“If only the waitresses were maids!” groaned Oda-kun.

“Haruka-kun is the only waiter here, but don’t give up!” called the girls.

“This sucks…”

A gentle wind crossed the plain as the girls tumbled onto the grass with full bellies, Slimey globbing all around them to match. Even Miss Armor Rep took off her armor to stretch, and the sports girls had stripped down to tank tops and collapsed. This caused the meatheads’ already miniscule minds to *poof* into nothing. I couldn’t sense anything left in there. Nothing!

Then we took a post-lunch stroll along the river on the way to the next dungeon. We had never been to this one before. It wasn’t far from the city, but there weren’t any nearby villages and the surrounding woods had recently been cleared, so we only discovered it a short while ago. *Who knew there was a dungeon here?*

“This is an oasis of panoramic greenery. Light shining through the trees and glimmering on a babbling brook. A magical monster-mauled paradise, a true site of natural beauty—and featuring easy access to a menacing dungeon. Lots for sale, y’know?”

“I almost want to buy land here?!”

There were some downsides, but it was a great region for sightseeing. The sights themselves? Well, a little dangerous, but…

“This is a great dungeon, right? You might fall down even deeper than the Ultimate Dungeon, but it’s not overly wide. The construction isn’t great, but not that far behind the Ultimate Dungeon for sure. It’s convenient for both the city and the monster forest, and thanks to the nearby river you can fish as much as you want! And as of now, the site even includes spellstones! Y’know!!”

“He’s definitely claiming this land after we beat the dungeon.”

“Oh no! A dungeon boss? Here? We should run!”

“Running defeats the whole point!”

Wiggle wiggle.

We never checked this area before now because there weren’t any villages, but it was a perfect site. The build quality was a little uneven, but the foundation was there. A talented dungeon boss must’ve designed this one.

“Look at that nice archway entrance! This dungeon just brings out the house flipper’s instinct, right?”

“He’s already starting to make renovations!”

“Nuh-uh, we haven’t killed the dungeon yet so I can’t actually renovate it. Even if I mess with it, it’ll just go back to normal.”

“You did this before and fell to the bottom floor! Have you learned nothing?!”

Well, from all my experimental renovations I learned that dungeons would just morph back to normal on their own. That made dungeons paradises in terms of experimental showrooms. You couldn’t waste the first impression of an entrance—the dungeon boss here knew that much. An entrance that made you aware of the interior spaciousness, a clever radial design. It really made you feel the depth of the building. I could expect great things from this property!

“Uh, how’s it any different?”

“This dungeon looks just like the other ones?”

The materials and the layout combined to give a dignified, stately impression—this dungeon was a deep one. At least 60 floors, possibly more than 70. *This could be bad…a dungeon that went down to the 80s or 90s would be nuts.* Down there, each floor was basically a gathering of dungeon boss-class monsters. Our class was definitely safe until floor 50. Even if the monsters were stronger than those of other dungeons, it’d be nothing that our level 100+ classmates couldn’t handle.

“Hm. Does the air does feel a little heavy? Maybe?”

“The kid going crazy over the interior design is kinda wigging me out, too.”

The girls felt different ever since they got over level 100. They all emanated auras of immense power. Oh, and the mean girls were well over 100. Level 104, it seemed. All the XP from our experience share had gotten saved up before we blew past the level cap, but still no evolution into Queen Bee yet. Maybe she needed to bite the head off of a level 100 dungeon boss first? That would do it! *But if I keep thinking about this, I think she'll bite my head off first. Oh, she's glaring at me right now! That's the glare of someone winding up to bite!*

"I'll start with the first-floor entrance and living room," I said. "Expand the rooms, ooh, and make a reception, la la!"

"He's having too much fun! He's starting to sing!"

Jiggle jiggle!

Yeah, this'll work as an entrance! If there were mirrors in this world, this would be the perfect place to hang a giant one. Unfortunately, mirrors were incredibly precious, and not even produced in the frontier. If I could make some, they'd probably sell like crazy. But a mirror would be too perfect here, I'm tellin' ya. Almost as perfect as one for my bedroom, now that I thought about it. How about a full-wall mirror? *Oooh, I'll get right on that!*

DAY 59

AFTERNOON

They've surpassed human limits. Or maybe I'm depressed because they were never functioning humans in the first place.

DUNGEON

1ST FLOOR

"WOULD BE NICE to have a wall rack here. You could make it feel kind of like an exhibition. Y'know?"

Jiggle jiggle?

Hmm. *Maybe a bookshelf would go better on the opposite side…but I don't have any books.* Well, I had some, but not even twenty yet, and more than half of them were contraband.

"Yeah, could be interesting to have some chairs, but in that case better have a counter…the entrance has gotta feel so spacious that you can't even make it to the living room!"

Nod nod.

I'd like to make the first-floor ceiling higher. Counter the closed-off dungeon sorta vibes, ideally. I'd add floor-to-ceiling windows, and then a catwalk to match. Now that'd be stylish!

"Would also be useful for cleaning," I pointed out.

Nod nod.

Jiggle jiggle.

For whatever reason, dungeons got dark so easily. So, I wanted at least the first floor to have an open atmosphere to contrast with the chic underground floors. LED lighting would look better with the indirect natural light further underground. I'd paint all the floors a matching color, and then design the first floor to let in as much natural light as possible…

"Hey, uh, we're in the middle of a battle here!"

“It’s gonna end, like, any second, but still, we’re totally fighting!”

“The three of them sat down in a circle and started drawing remodeling plans!”

I mean, one member of our group would be enough for a bunch of level 1 ghouls, right? The only danger they posed was to the property value! Imagine telling prospective buyers about the massacre we’d carried out here?

“This design would’ve been perfect if it didn’t stink so bad in here…”

Nod nod.

Wiggle wiggle.

The level 100 power-ups were insane. My classmates were on a different level now. They had surpassed human limits. And some of them hadn’t even started as functioning humans!

“Stop trying to run up walls without the skill! They’re just ghouls walking on the floor, so why are you on the ceiling?! Don’t get the walls dirty! Ugh, I’m depressed now!”

Level 100 humans could take out a group of first-floor level 1 dungeon monsters naked. We had a nudist in our class after all, and—oh, was she trying to get naked now?!

“To welcome our customers, I’m enacting a strict no-nudist policy,” I said. “Oh, and I’ll make a swimming pool down below for Fish Girl!”

“I’m not taking off my clothes! Why would I? They’re still on?!”

“You can’t take them off because you’re not really wearing them in the first place…”

“You’re not wearing any! *These* are clothes! Got it?! Clothes!”

A pool would be nice to have in general. I bet Fish Girl missed the water. After spending all her life swimming in the ocean every day…even now, she would still rather be swimming. I felt bad for her.

“I’m not a ‘fish girl,’ and why are you ignoring everything we say?!”

“Well, you know.”

Let's imagine the drama: International championship competition-level Nudist Girl, and ordinary average competitor Fish Girl. Fish Girl was more of a sports manager than an all-star. Apparently, Fish Girl had better technique, but Nudist Girl, born with an athlete's body, was just faster. The only difference was physical, as Fish Girl loved swimming and had better form, too. So, Fish Girl taught Nudist Girl technique, as Nudist Girl aspired to Fish Girl's perfect form. That's how an ordinary high school produced an elite swimmer worthy of Olympic representation. Yes, if they hadn't come to this world, the two of them would still be swimming now. Glub glub glub glub, glub glub glub glub?

"The compliments are appreciated, but calling me Fish Girl ruins the whole thing!"

"And I'm *not naked*! Wahhh!"

Jiggle jiggle.

So, I definitely wanted to make them a pool at some point…and rip them off for entrance fees! Well, maybe I could make it for free out of the kindness of my heart. Then they'd have to come to me for swimsuits. I mean, Nudist Girl had already ordered two school swimsuits. But why school swimsuits and not competitive swimsuits? Was this some kind of sex-appeal trap? Because a teenage boy alone in his room making school swimsuits was definitely disastrous! Especially for his luck with the ladies!

"Huh, did you guys say something? So, anyway, can I put a pool here?"

"That means renovations, doesn't it?"

Jiggle jiggle.

But when I really think about it, if it's for those two, sure. I wouldn't mind doing them a couple of favors. Making a pool, making swimsuits. The problem was that it wouldn't just stop at two. I was sure of that!

Of course I'd make one for Miss Armor Rep. That was obvious. Duh! The problem was that Miss Armor Rep would definitely show it off, and then I'd get a deluge of orders. The orders themselves weren't the problem. What would follow, however, would be a repeat of the ultimate hell for a teen boy: measuring!

“I mean, that was like getting caught up in a half-dead state in a murderous whirlpool-geyser of spinning, raging, uncontrollable, gushing, spouting, exploding lust. Too much for a teenage boy to handle, you feel me?”

Jiggle jiggle?

That would become a true hell. The school swimsuit incident!

“Haruka-kun, we’re gooooing—”

“To the next floor?”

“I don’t know why the hell you’re muttering about school swimsuits to yourself while renovating the dungeon, but try to keep up, ’kay?”

Apparently, I was muttering to myself. I’d have to explain yet again why I didn’t do anything wrong in order to escape a lecture. I really didn’t get it. I’d made a placard to wear around that said, “I didn’t do anything wrong. I swear,” but apparently they thought the placard was raising questions already answered by my placard. Alas, how frail are the words that bind us all together! Because I didn’t do anything wrong. Honest!

“Psst… Is he finally going to make bathing suits?”

“A bikini would require some serious guts, or more like, nuts…”

“When do you think he’ll open reservations?”

“And what about price and models?”

“Maybe he’ll do custom orders?”

“Let’s get Angelica-san to spill the beans tonight.”

“But where are we going to swim? Isn’t the river too dangerous?”

“Then I want underwear!”

“And breast pads…”

For some reason the girls erupted into whispered chatter. They were way too relaxed. We were in a dungeon—keeping your guard up was the first preparation of all essential preparations.

“High school girls nowadays! Always JK this, JK that, J for *joshi* K for *kosei,* I mean they should be like ‘JK!’ Because they are JK. Like,

joshikosei as in high school girls. Seriously. But if they were JFK, they'd get assassinated, so no thanks."

"Stop! You're trying to wind us up!"

Looked like the second floor still wasn't enough to require anyone to give any effort.

"This long, gently sloping hall could be great for a living room, or even a production facility," I commented.

Jiggle jiggle.

"Exactly. Just furnish the whole length of the hall to create flow. A perfect union of form, function, and style! This dungeon is outstanding!"

Nod nod?

"We're fighting over here! Quit renovating the damn floor!"

"Even the monsters are confused!"

Bleh, it wasn't like the battle would last very long? The girls were really strong. Strong, fast, and devastating. Their stats were frankly terrifying. A monster without skills didn't stand a chance, and even setting aside their strength, the girls had amazing skills and equipment, too. They were faster and buffer than their opponents to begin with. That was more than enough to win.

Just as expected, their bonuses went up at level 100, too. But it seemed to me that they were even stronger than their stat changes indicated. The merry-go-round rampage was a dangerous strategy, regardless of level. It'd be devastating to any teenage boy, for instance!

"It's no good, he's starting to put out furniture in the dungeon!"

"You can't do that, the monsters are gonna, like, totally go soft!"

Jiggle jiggle!

"Yeah, they're gonna get all decadent and lazy!"

What did Vice Rep B have against monsters having a good time? So healthy monsters that attacked us were fine, but healthy monsters that chilled out and vibed on some furniture were bad? Vice Rep B was fuming and jiggling… *Ahem, ahem!* Oh shit, twenty killer glares at once!

“I mean, I won’t be able to draw up a ground plan until I experiment with the layout, and putting in furniture actually makes it pretty cramped in some places.”

Jiggle jiggle.

Seriously, you couldn’t come up with a good floor plan until you actually tried laying out furniture to see how the residents used the space. The problem was I wasn’t sure if monsters could even use counters? And these were rabbit monsters, too. Maybe they would just hop on to the counters and look cute.

“Front row, shields up, don’t let your guard down!”

“Awww, but they’re soooo cute!”

Squeeeeak!

“Even their voices are cute!”

They were cute, but they were also level 2 spike rabbits, and the bad girls killed their little rabbit tails. They were so adorable with their little squeaks. I’d rather enthrall these little guys than the mean girls. An army of enslaved bunnies would definitely be better for my sex appeal than high school girls. Where could I submit my trade-in request form? If I tried to use a trade-in counter, though, I bet they’d bite me… Not the rabbits, but the mean girls, of course. *They’re glaring at me right now.*

“Such a nice layout, too,” I sighed.

Wiggle wiggle.

Small problem: the first floor stunk with zombie, and this floor was full of rabbit holes.

“We can split up the lower levels into multiple rooms, but I think it’s best to keep the top floor as one big room, right? Down on the lower floors we can have training rooms and forges and workshops and all that, but I can’t do a swimming pool…down in the 40s and 50s, storage rooms should do the trick, right? Seems annoying to haul anything down further than that.”

Jiggle jiggle.

Nod nod.

Anyway, this was a rare property, better than anything in town or near my cave. I wanted to see all the upper floors before committing. Conquering the dungeon would be the first step before I could do anything with it, and that might take a minute. *Hm, but the humidity is a bit much.*

DAY 59

AFTERNOON

The rise in stats is unfortunate. Looks like it didn't reflect their intelligence at all.

DUNGEON

38TH FLOOR

I DECIDED I WOULD renovate the place in the end; the location really couldn't be beat. Still, the ceiling was low. Maybe because most of the monsters were on the small side?

"It's lacking in vertical space, so it feels a bit oppressive. Would be good for individual rooms, but…hmm, cramped spaces mean stagnant air. We're close to the river, so maybe that's why it's so humid."

Jiggle jiggle.

It did follow that compared to the Ultimate Dungeon this place was seriously lacking in refinement and build quality. The layout was less impressive than my first impression, too.

"Simultaneous arrow strike and high-speed charge from the vanguard! *Fiiiire!* And the three trailing renovators, quit it already!"

"Aye aye, cap'n! Charge!"

And so full of holes! Oh, I guess I should say: the level 38 bears were getting thrashed all over the place. The combination of a high-speed charge and our OP equipment made us a terrifying force, enough to shred the bears' HP to dust. That was level 100 fighting—that was unbeatable might. The only thing missing was a few brain cells. Why were those guys charging with their boomerangs in hand?! Since when did boomerangs become melee weapons, and when would they actually start throwing them?

"I made halberds for the entire vanguard and you're still using the boomerangs!" I shouted. "And you're not even throwing them!"

"Huh? Since when?" the meatheads said.

Come on…

But the boomerangs did the job. *Well, who the hell am I to decide what a boomerang's for, anyway?* We could make it to the 50th floor without danger like this. The other guys were strong enough to defeat the rafflesia now, and they could probably get through that sea of mummies, too. I wasn't sure about Slimey. It was probably wise to assume he was gaining some eldritch qualities with all those power ups. On the one-off chance we ran into something like the Sand Giant again, my classmates were at least strong enough to retreat safely. The strength to get away when we're out of our depth was the most important thing. If it was at all possible to make it out alive, we could.

I'd made them simple forcefield equipment for emergency situations, and those would help buy everyone time. They were safely tucked away in our item bags. The forcefields only worked for a few minutes, but that would do the trick in an emergency. I couldn't put my hopes in an emergency teleportation item, however. I was the only one with the Teleport skill, and I could barely even use it yet. That sort of item would be too dangerous to use, regardless of the situation.

I still couldn't believe I made it to Stalker Girl back then. I hadn't used Teleport to travel long-distance, let alone a medium distance, since. Super-short distances were the only way I could avoid tearing myself apart. Maybe it worked if you could imagine a very specific destination? I managed to send myself flawlessly to Miss Armor Rep by setting her precise coordinates, after all.

"Check for damages and injuries," called Class Rep.

"None found."

"All good here!"

This dungeon seemed deep, so I wasn't sure how far we should go. No matter how strong they were, at some point, it'd become too dangerous. Their super-high levels aside, they had limits to their stamina. Monsters could still overcome them. These students may have been as strong as legendary heroes at level 100, but there is no friendly draw in a dungeon

battle—if you don't win, then you lose. And, well, if you lose, that means you die. That's just how it works.

"They're all incredibly strong now, but that hasn't changed what they are. We're all just teens."

"They must learn…how to…use physicality and skill," said Miss Armor Rep. "Strength is—is numbers, not…"

Jiggle jiggle.

The three of us could handle it. There was Miss Armor Rep, with technique so flawless you could call it a cheat. Slimey's entire existence at this point was a cheat. And then there was me, the cowardly cheater king himself. The girls bowed before us, the co-winners of the triple crown of cheats.

"That's hardly a compliment, thinking on it. Grr, I'll punish them! I'll rip them off again tonight! And why did they enjoy being punished so much last night, anyway?!"

Jiggle jiggle.

With this and that, we made it down to the 43rd floor, which finally had a secret chamber. After the monsters had been broken and beaten, scattered and shot, destroyed by the rain of arrows and frontal high-speed charge, I finally came to a conclusion: yup, they sure were strong. That was level 100 for you. They had transcended the border between humanity and what lay beyond it. A whole damn gaggle of transcendent teens.

"I'm back. Mr. Treasure was: 'Storm Mace. Power, resistance, intelligence +30%. Windstorm. Earthquake. Internal Destruction. +ATT.' Oh, that's *nasty*. Looks like it gets under the equipment and starts mincing your insides into hamburger and dumpling meat. That's revolting! Oh! That reminds me, let's have gyoza for dinner! How about it?"

"Why are you bringing poor hamburgers and gyoza into this?"

"No dinner planning in the dungeon! And no ground meat for dinner tonight!"

We were short on hammers and maces, so this weapon was precious. Plus, as a dungeon item, it had great effects. I wanted an axe, too, though, and we didn't have enough armor. We had a decent number of swords, sure,

but a serious shortage of gloves, boots, or cloaks. We did have a ton of accessories, but we'd never have enough of those.

Miss Armor Rep had the best equipment in the group, so she was fine, but even my own equipment was a little bit underwhelming—and we weren't even close to getting sufficient equipment for thirty people. Not good. The best we could do was slowly but surely gather better items. We would never be in the best shape, but we could always get better. Only thing for it was more dungeon raiding.

"We have to stay vigilant for assassins, so I want self-protection equipment, too…oof. That's big."

On the 47th floor I found an axe. Guess I raised the event flag for it. *Maybe I should wish for an item? Or for more wishes?* But no matter how much I tried to conjure it, a sex-appeal boosting accessory never appeared! Maybe that event flag was torn.

This was a nice find, though. "Fracture Poleax: Vitality, power, dexterity +30%. Physical resistance (large). Fracture. Equipment Fracture. +ATT." Great effects. Plus it had a resistance skill and Equipment Fracture too. What a great item! This dungeon had some good stuff in it. This kind of quality on item drops, this early on, meant that this might be a *bad* dungeon. And I couldn't start thinking about how these items' specialties involved destroying your insides. Kinda disgusting overkill for fighting humans at war. Regardless, having equipment that bypassed other equipment was a huge advantage. Getting destroyed on the inside was a pretty horrible thought, but these items were strong, no doubt about that. Looked like I needed to think about getting some equipment to protect my backside, 'cause the thought of getting destroyed on the inside there? Horrifying! *Although I guess I'd rise again? Rise to the occasion?* Not that I wanted to try that sort of thing! This wasn't just teenage boy squeamishness, most men aren't into that! Anywhere but there!

"What's up with these drop items?"

"The monsters should be using them to fight us, not the other way around."

Not that war sounded more appealing just because we were better equipped for it, but my classmates might legitimately be over-leveled now.

There was no waiting for me anymore. Even considering they'd been stuck at level 99 for a while, not even two months had passed since we had arrived and they were already level 100. The cheat-wielders' level growth had far surpassed my expectations.

"I can never figure out what to do with strong items like these. Probably best for the vanguard, right?"

Nod nod.

The weapon- and equipment-breaking items would do well in the hands of the sports girls, who specialized in close-quarters combat. Gymnastics Girl had some peculiar weapon. It had good effects ever since I powered it up with mithril; it was perfectly adapted to interpersonal combat. It could automatically transform into a variety of weapons via alchemy: from a ball into a stick, a ribbon into a hoop, and so on. A weapon forged for rhythmic gymnastics. I had never seen her use the hoop before. The way we figured out that spinning it around was no good in battle was when she'd tried it. She nearly lopped off a few of our heads. Any swords, spears, or arms that got too close would've been torn apart! Terrifying! That hoop was true evil! The ribbon was also nasty, but the hoop was the true terror. It was scary enough that even Miss Armor Rep gave it a nod of acknowledgement. If mastered, the hoop could be devastating. Never occurred to me before that moment.

So, Gymnastics Girl was the melee master. She could transform at will, adapting her weapon to always gain the advantage. She danced around with backflips and cartwheels, which made her impossible to catch, and if you tried it, you'd get clobbered. It was like a dance of murder, choreographed full of unpredictable, dizzying movements.

If you approached fighting her like any human who moved normally, she'd spring away, her body bending and shifting, rolling out of the path of your attack only to come lunging back at you. Honestly, her fighting style was closer to that of Slimey than the other girls. An absolute nightmare for humans to deal with. Those poor skeletons were all marrow and bones. Maybe she'd flayed the meat off them.

"Their formation has crumbled! Secure an escape route for Gymnastics Girl!"

"Jaaah!"

It was best to stick with the same weapon. Switching weapons in battle was useful, but slow. For the most part she used a bow or a sword, but that bo staff in her hands was making her one hell of a weapon herself.

"Maybe I should make her something that would be more useful against monsters? She seems like she could master a curved sword. A shotel or scimitar might be perfect."

She could definitely handle monsters with the Storm Mace, but I wasn't sure about giving it to her. She was the only one capable of comprehending her own fighting style, and she definitely cleaned up, but for some reason she got so upset whenever I called her Febreze-san? *C'mon, Gymnastics Girl has so many syllables!*

"We're heading in!"

"Kakizaki-kun's group is leaving formation!"

"Seriously?!"

With more specialized combat styles in the group now, arrangements were more complicated. The vanguard was all strong, but the mid-guard was split into evasive-types and assassin-types. The strength and speed of everyone was starting to get in the way.

"Confirm enemy status!"

"All dead."

"Here too."

"Totally wiped out."

They finished even the 49th floor in the blink of an eye. This dungeon had a lot of floors, each with a group of monsters, and each got obliterated instantly. The 49th floor had level 49 metal worms—the moment the class identified their physical resistance, they prepared Inferno magic, shouted "Mow 'em down!", and then unleashed a simultaneous blazing fury. Not sure if it was good karma to take them down without even giving them a chance, though.

Yeah, something felt rotten.

A chill came—at last, we made it to the 50th floor dungeon boss—and it was a giant elephant.

“Technically all elephants are giant, but this one is even bigger, so you can call it a giant elephant. Right?”

Jiggle jiggle.

It went without saying, but its snout was extremely wrong. Its mother must’ve had one hell of a schnoz, too. Now if dad had a short snout, *that* would’ve started a serious family discussion. Maybe some family secrets would have come to light. But before the secret melodrama of the elephant’s paternity could be revealed, its life came to an unfortunate end. It fell over.

“Encircle! Vanguard, raise your shields and close in. Ranged, aim for the stomach!”

“We’ll take the front!”

“The back is ours!”

“Stomach squad, gather round!”

“This snout is trouble; we need help over here!”

“Is the tail dangerous, too?”

“And quit narrating the boss’s family secrets!” they shouted at me.

Trumpeeeet!

They won. So why, exactly, were the meatheads so well-suited to hunting a level 50 blizzard mammoth? It came a little too naturally for them. Once they threw their spears and the mammoth stopped moving, they started whacking it with boomerangs. *I hate the fact that I’m not even surprised anymore. Those aren’t throwing spears, they’re halberds! They’re designed for close-range combat! The boomerangs are for ranged attacks! Y’all are Swordsman classes, so use your damn swords!* I hadn’t seen them use their swords once in weeks. Don’t tell me they sold them?!

“Good job, mammoth. I mean, this mammoth had a pretty hard day. I mean, the only one who had any kind of difficulty was the mammoth, so I’m pretty sure we should be consoling the mammoth right now. It’s in an eternal sleep—damn, it must’ve been exhausted!”

“*I’m* exhausted! That was huge!”

“It had over 2,000 HP and insane defenses! After all that work, I sure hope the mammoth is tired!”

Don’t tell me that was it. Maybe we’d find the identity of Good Job Mammoth’s father written in the fantasy world language somewhere? Although I guess even if the secret was revealed, it would still never find out. It was a mammoth, and more importantly, it was dead. Who knew the mammoth’s native language, anyway? Maybe our resident cavemen?

“What’s next? If you guys wanna go down I won’t stop you, but if you need some help I’ll lend you a hand. Or maybe lend you a stick, because Miss Armor Rep’s probably gonna go crazy if she doesn’t get a chance to fight, and then my stick will get a pretty serious beating tonight. Although if you let me I’ll go solo and go so low, so lonely. I never get a chance to do anything, honestly.”

“Let’s go to the next floor!”

“Yeah, I can still fight!”

It made sense that none of the monsters up to the 50th floor posed any real threat. But because all of my classmates were getting drastically stronger, their discipline was crumbling. Not completely, but they needed to get it together, and getting back into the habit while going against level 50+ monsters wasn’t gonna be easy. Still, they seemed to want to keep going?

“Then in that case, first come, first serve. Or *fast* come *fast* serve! Fastest to go down gets to grab and grapple and gargle the monsters. Three, two, one, go!”

Super-speed. Down to the 51st, 52nd, 53rd floors. I sliced through the monsters in my way, instantly killing them all, maintaining high-speed movement as I charged through them, ripping through all obstacles. Class Rep and the others were probably still on the 51st floor. 54, 55, 56, 57—I was ready to keep it up all the way to the 60th floor dungeon boss when I noticed a secret chamber on the 57th floor. I quickly entered there and disposed of the monster in the way. I could use Appraisal later. For now, I just kept going down.

“What a head-start! I had way too much energy saved up, I can really run now!”

Jiggle jiggle!

I surged down to the 58th, the 59th, all the way to the 60th floor. Class Rep and the others were probably still mopping up my leftovers. It didn't take too long to break through to the next room without bothering to take out all of the enemies. Our head start and high speed plus the time it would take them to collect the spellstones guaranteed that they wouldn't catch up!

"Wow, these monsters are actually the right strength? Nothing too deadly. Maybe we should head back to Class Rep?"

Nod nod.

Wiggle wiggle.

Yeah, I wouldn't want to just rush into this boss. It was gross, too! And it was the perfect level of strength for my classmates, so it'd be a waste to wipe it out so unceremoniously. Also, can't emphasize enough: *so* gross? *Time to get my class and force them to fight this guy.*

It was…a giant fly. Buzzing around at high speeds. It had unique skills, but nothing particularly dangerous, and was specialized for evasion, so physical and magic attacks worked on it—perfect for my classmates' training! Miss Armor Rep and I hated flies because *ew*, and Slimey's jiggling indicated he had no interest in eating one. *We're so benevolent,* I thought. *What generous hearts we have.*

"All right, withdraw!"

Nod nod!

Jiggle jiggle!

Our consideration for the rest of the class truly knows no bounds. That's what this is. Generosity, definitely!

DAY 59

AFTERNOON

I gave them to you for experience out of the sheer generosity and benevolence of my heart. So what's the problem?

DUNGEON

59TH FLOOR

WE WENT BACK to the 59th floor, killing all the monsters on our way to meeting back up with the class. Attacking the monsters from behind reminded me of the Ultimate Dungeon, but before I could get too deep in my nostalgia, Miss Armor Rep and Slimey destroyed every monster on the floor instantaneously.

"We're back, and you guys are still on the 52nd floor? And what's with these vibes. Are you having a party without us?! We wholeheartedly, earnestly, single-mindedly, sincerely, devotedly *blasted* through the monsters, just so you guys could have a party?! What gives?"

"Excuse me, we're fighting the monsters! It's been less than five minutes!"

"We had to pick up the spellstones that you left on the ground!"

"We thought we had gotten stronger, but it was all in vain."

"Seriously."

I was planning to clean up after myself on the way back, but they picked up the spellstones for me. And for some reason, glares…because I didn't prepare food for their party, right? They didn't even invite me to their party, and they expected me to cater it? That's a bullied high school boy right there! *I didn't come to this world just to get bullied into being an errand boy! Is this what happens in a fantasy world when you're magically drained of your magnetism?* And why didn't I have any sex appeal back in Japan, either? Which parallel world had it gotten sucked to?

“Look, anyway there’s a wonderful, marvelous floor boss awaiting an introduction to you on the 60th floor—a real, serious floor boss, I would love for you to meet each other. He’s a real serious character, a busy *bzz-bzz* kinda guy to keep you up at night. So I’ll just sit on the sidelines and send my love and support, and so on and so forth, good luck, God bless!”

“This is suspicious!”

“What exactly do you mean by a ‘busy *bzz-bzz*’ guy who keeps you up?”

“Didn’t some old daimyo write a poem about not being able to sleep because of mosquitos?”

“Yeah! Don’t tell me we’re going to be facing Matsudaira Sadanobu, Lv. 60?! No way!”

“How are you listening to anything Haruka-kun says?”

Wow, I guess Matsudaira Sadanobu’s Kansei Reform policies weren’t popular with the teens?

“You traitor!”

“Angelica-san won’t even look at us!”

“She’s making faces at us!”

Wink, bleeeh!

“Even Slimey!”

Jiggle jiggle!

In the midst of such distrust and discontent, we made our way to the 60th floor. I was kind enough to let my staff (classmates) pick up the spellstones along the way, ya hear?

“Oh god—get in defensive formation!”

“Aye aye aaaahhhhhhhh!”

The giant fly charged. It was weird, gross, black, and glossy, squealing disgustingly. My classmates didn’t seem like they were big fans of it, either. Even the meatheads stayed away from the giant fly. It must have been objectively gross, not just gross to us fly-haters. And with their

experience fighting all manner of monsters in this world, everyone knew… the moment they cut into it, bug juice would go spurting everywhere!

"Aaaaaaahhhhhhhhh!"

"I wish the boss *was* Matsudaira Sadanobu!"

A reckless, ever-changing, shape-shifting, high-speed racing Matsudaira Sadanobu… Nope. Our opponent was "Gigantic Fly, Lv: 60." An acrobatic, evasive creature. Absolutely repulsive.

The class entered a defensive formation to keep their distance from the fly and started loosing arrows. But the fly managed to evade their simultaneous strike. A single arrow couldn't do enough damage even if it did land, and the fly was even managing to dodge their magic attacks. You had to defeat it at close range. *I'll pass, though.*

I mean, flies flew? So good luck getting close enough. It was in the air, charging at my classmates. If they stabbed it, they would have no way to avoid the fly juice! And because the 60th floor was spacious with a high ceiling, I didn't have enough pesticide to fill the space. Airwalk wouldn't be enough either. You simply needed to be fast enough to keep up with this thing. Getting absolutely drenched in bug guts was the only way forward.

"And I can't use Holding because I can feel the thing I'm holding without touching it directly… Nope. No thanks."

Jiggle jiggle!

It was the perfect boss for them. Strong, but not deadly. Gross and difficult to defeat, but no risk of killing anyone. Nasty, but fast. A perfect training partner. Miss Armor Rep and Slimey were even nodding in agreement, so I knew my assessment was sound. *Nod nod. Jiggle jiggle.*

Sometimes the best leaders take a step back. I had to take a step back. This boss was too perfect for them; it was in all of our best interests for me to let them step up and finally be the heroes they were born to be. Also, definitely not into the bug juice.

"Just try to hit it with a ranged attack, anything!"

"Storm!"

"Hell Flame!"

“Wind Circle! I can’t hit it!”

“Savage Slice,” shouted Vice Rep B. “Wha, whaaaaa?!”

“It’s coming!”

“Waaaaaaaah!”

They couldn’t hit it. The fly could sense their magic—it wasn’t looking at the magic and dodging. It sensed the flow of the magic, which enabled it to evade before it was even fully cast. And with its many eyes, it had no blind spots, making it even more difficult to hit. Again, the perfect training partner. Definitely. *Nod nod! Jiggle jiggle!*

“Looks like this’ll take a while. Should we give them some back-up? Waiting will take ages, and sitting around here is so boring, and gross, but yeah. We’ll just let them handle the gross parts.”

Nod nod.

Wiggle wiggle.

We were always totally in sync. Huh. Maybe it was an effect of Servitude?

“We can hear you!” they shouted. “We don’t want to do the gross part either!”

I used Holding to seize my magic power and spread it out thin over a wide range. Then, I directed the magic into the course of the gigantic fly’s flight path. Once it came into range, I grabbed the giant fly with Holding, like I was wielding a giant sheet of fly paper. If I used Magic Hands, I would’ve felt the sensation of the Gigantic Fly in raw, vivid detail, so that was a no. Even thinking about it was gross! I hated this!

I couldn’t have caught it with Gravity magic, and even if I could, I probably wouldn’t be able to force it to the ground. I assumed that it was incredibly light for its size. And with its sharp, precise movements I couldn’t nail down its location… So, in a rare turn of events, Miss Armor Rep and Slimey used magic attacks to cover for me. I had to make sure I didn’t touch it at all costs! Once I had the fly stuck in Holding, the class could launch a new simultaneous attack. Every last person kept their distance—nobody wanted to get anywhere near that thing. And when my

classmates released their attack, the three of us ran for it. We dashed to a small room by the stairwell for cover and—*SPLAT!*

"Gr-*groooooooss*!"

Yup. The biggest reason we didn't wanna land any attacks had been because of its skill—Self-Destruct. It blew up with explosive force, spraying a sea of bug juice and fly guts everywhere. Maggots and larvae, too… We had a healthy fear of its maggot-strike.

"WAAAAAAAAAAHHHHH!!!!!"

The whole room instantly ignited in a storm of rampaging flames. The raging fire gobbled up the maggots as they spawned one after the next—it even threatened to overcome the forcefield that the nerds launched at the very last second. Yeah, we'd awoken the Archsage's fury. Her whole face was covered in fly juice and maggots dripped off of every inch of her body. Oh, and her face, of course.

"This is bad—the floor is gonna collapse!"

"How do we stop her?!"

She had lost all control and kept igniting an endless chain of flame explosions. Meanwhile, her whole body was soggy and dripping in fly juice and guts.

"Someone, stop her!"

"Yeah, and maybe that someone should be the guy responsible for this!"

Oh no—she had lost it. She was on a complete rampage and didn't seem to understand anyone around her.

"AAAAAAAAGGGGGGHHHH!"

"We can't maintain the forcefield much longer!"

Her eyes had lost all humanity. No one could get close to her because of all the fiery magic…which meant that the only option was to seal her magic. It was the only measure we had. Wait any more, and she'd be putting herself at risk—*Hello? Anyone in there?*

"*AAGGGGGGHHHHHHHH*—wha?!"

There we go! She settled down. Vice Rep B finally stopped running. The danger was gone for the time being, but I had to reinforce the floor quickly. *What a pain.*

"Ewwwwwwwww!"

"There, there, it's all over now, isn't it?"

"Ewwww!" sobbed Vice Rep B.

"You were the one who stabbed the fly, weren't you?"

Look, if I had gone for a head-on attack and stabbed it, then I'd have gotten soaked instead. I needed to deviate from the targets to avoid getting hit by the law of inertia. I mean, everyone was safe, although the nerdly lineup of the Saint, the Guardian, and the Ninja, oh, and the Sage were super toast. Dead out of MP. They used up all their magic protecting everyone from the hellfire rampage.

I could've roasted them all I wanted now, but they worked hard today, so I decided to give them a pass. They saved everyone from our local Archsage. If they hadn't worked so hard protecting themselves from Hair Whorl every day, they probably couldn't have done it. Guess it wasn't enough to protect themselves from the bug juice and maggots, though.

It wasn't just the nerds. The rest of my classmates were also covered head to toe in dripping bug juice, guts, and maggots. We still had time left today, but maybe it was best to go back and relax a little. My classmates weren't just glaring at me—those were eyes with the intention to kill!

All the light in the world had vanished from their eyes. They had turned into inorganic matter, devoid of life. Yeah, that'd do it for today. Their silence was starting to terrify me.

DAY 59

AFTERNOON

Nowadays I wouldn't even notice it if I left my weapons at home!

DUNGEON

66TH FLOOR

I PUT TOGETHER a simple shower in the dungeon so they could wash off the drippy, soggy, mushy bug guts from their bodies. Then, with murderous black holes for eyes, they went back to town.

"Do you think they can make it back safely?" I wondered.

Wiggle wiggle.

I felt bad for any monsters that tried to attack them. They'd take out all their anger on those poor monsters!

"It's been a while since the three of us have done dungeon raiding together," I said. "But why are all the monsters gone by the time I strike my cool battle pose?! The only fight scenes I've gotten lately are when Miss Armor Rep beats the crap out of me—I don't get any in the actual dungeons! Nowadays I wouldn't even notice it if I left my weapons at home! It's like having a meeting end by the time I introduce myself."

Wiggle wiggle.

Slimey was consoling me! I was ready to start sobbing into Slimey's chest, but he didn't have a chest. He was a Slime.

If I could have a different chest, however, I would happily bury myself deep and deeper into it… Maybe after our battle tonight. Well, never mind, propriety wouldn't allow it! Also, Miss Armor Rep had already unsheathed her sword and was pointing it at me. I was getting the impression if I tried it now, I'd get massacred. *To be continued tonight!*

We cut our way easily through the level 66 assassin ghosts of the 66th floor. Apparently Slimey could eat ghosts. After running away from the fly like the rest of us? That was too gross to eat, though. The assassin ghosts

were dangerous enemies that swooped at us from out of nowhere, stabbing everything in their way. This would be the point where my classmates started having a tough time. If they let their guard down for a second, they'd get stabbed in the back, so even with their level 100 vitality and hit points, they wouldn't have been safe. Starting after the 50th floor, the enemy's attacks started targeting your weaknesses…not that it saved them. Even if they disappeared to evade, I could still see their magic power with Jupiter Eye, so I knew exactly where they were. So, the assassin ghosts did their thing, disappearing, approaching, but they weren't materialized. They couldn't attack in their invisible state. So, when they did appear, bam. Slaughtered and devoured. Why didn't they just break pattern and come at us?

"Looks like ghosts are always weak to the Sword Goddess skill. I mean, we can see them even when they disappear. It's inevitable that they'll get destroyed. They would've been way stronger if they just tried to attack us normally, so what are they doing sneaking around all quasi-invisible?"

They just couldn't escape their assassin-class habits. Was that their ghostly pride getting the best of them? Whatever. I kept stabbing them.

I found more dungeon items in the secret chamber. The assassin ghosts had drop items too, and they all had equipment-destroying effects attached—an evident specialty of this dungeon. Equipment-destroying weapons were useless against monsters that didn't hold items, but they also had significant stat boosts in the 40 percent range, so they were excellent products all around. I was right to assume that deeper dungeons had better finds. And the assassin ghosts were so ingratiating that they turned into spellstones right after getting killed. That made it a lot easier to pick up the spellstones. If I could fight these every day, my road to riches would be smooth sailing! Covered in blood, but smooth!

"Let's peek into the lower levels, okay? Make sure to coordinate. By which I mean: please let me get a few hits in? A teenage boy muttering to himself in a fighting pose while all the monsters get slaughtered isn't great for his self-esteem. My HP stays full, but anyway. What should I do for dinner? I have tomatoes and olive oil but no cheese. What a bummer! I want pizza. We don't have any seafood, so I can't make pasta alle vongole,

but I do have some basil olive oil I threw together. Can I make something Italian-esque?"

Jiggle jiggle?

Slimey doubted me?! Don't tell me that this fantasy-world rubbery ball of slime had something against Italian cooking? I was sure he would eat it—he had eaten everything up until now besides sand, rocks, and this fly, so there was no way he didn't like Italian food. All his other dietary restrictions made sense, at any rate.

The 67th floor flew by just as quickly. Here came a gang of level 67 sword weasels. I had never seen a weasel before, so I couldn't be one hundred percent sure, but they appeared to be weasels whose entire bodies were swords. They still looked pretty weaselly.

"The Japanese character for 'weasel' is so cool looking that I bet they feel lucky they're not just boring swords, know what I mean?"

These weasels had full-body magic immunity and launched kamikaze attacks. There were tons of them. An absolute herd of weasels charged at us. I was ready in my cool fighting pose, but they didn't even make it to me. I tried running towards the fight, but by the time I ran over to where they had been, they were already fleeing the other way.

"Wait, don't eat *all* of them! I'll never get my turn in the sun! At this rate, the only thing my tentacles will be good for is spellstone collecting and mushroom-picking and other basic household tasks. That's no fun! Spare one for meee!"

Jiggle jiggle!

With immense effort, I managed to take out two. There were almost two hundred of them, a giant group of weasels, and I barely managed to kill two. And I almost didn't get to them! As I suspected, Miss Armor Rep had gotten bored with her job as teacher, and the weasels—shrewd enough to recognize a lost cause when they saw one—ran away from her as fast as they could. Hm, that rang a bell. Reminds me of someone familiar… Anyway! After a quick fight, and a long spellstone-gathering session, we went down to the 68th floor. This one was maze-like, with a low ceiling and a secret chamber in the back. I guess the nice floors were all in the upper section.

"More bugs! Sending them back was the right move," I said.

Nod nod.

Jiggle jiggle.

Yeah, this whole area was nasty. That massive group of sword weasels would've likely killed me if I were alone. Even if I had managed to rely on my equipment to get all the way down here by myself, if they found a way to corner me, I would've gotten sliced apart right there, totally unable to even resist. This was the best sort of practical training possible, but my two servants were carrying me through fights a little too much, get what I mean? *Why is everyone babying me?* I thought. I almost died every day but always sprang back just fine, so you'd think that would have earned their trust and confidence by now. But no, it was worse than ever! *Maybe it's my lack of sex appeal…?*

More bugs. This time, a swarm of small ones. I heard about these from the meatheads. Grasshoppers that came rushing in a simultaneous, spear-shaped charge—level 68 spear hoppers.

There were thousands—no, tens of thousands of them. You'd have to be plain stupid to try to fight these without insecticide. No modern person would ever even attempt that. But those meatheads had! No idea how they beat them.

So, I took out my insecticide herbs, smoked them, used Holding to gather and transport the smoke, and then enclosed the grasshoppers within the smoke cloud. It was an efficient method for minimizing insecticide use, and above all else, it minimized my cleanup effort by creating a single, concentrated clod of spellstones. Seemed like the effects of Holding changed after I got Void magic. As I used it more often, stranger and more difficult-to-control functionalities appeared. Shouldn't it get easier over time?

At least it had more possible uses. Yeah, it was getting stronger, but that made it harder and harder to use. Hey, on the bright side, clustering all those spellstones together helped me combat litter this time. Environmentally friendly! That was good enough for me.

"Maybe I could boil the spear grasshoppers in soy…the meatheads would probably eat that, right? Well, they've already vanished, but you

know what I mean."

The 69th floor was a slaughter. This dungeon had mostly small monsters, low ceilings, and a bunch of little chambers. I had to sprint across the cramped rooms, dodging and attacking, slashing and thrusting. Shooting and slicing, threading the gap while hewing and hawing. My classmates had created an uncrossable gap between us. I could never reach them in terms of stats, making me hopeless in a fair fight. So, a fight wasn't an option—I had to one-sidedly massacre, dive through the void, teeter between life and death.

I couldn't save anyone with my powers, not even a small village and its inhabitants. The elderly became feed for slaughter to the hordes. Families defended their own without even proper weapons because soldiers and adventurers left to seek their fortunes and promptly died. The miserable fools of this vile domain were so acquainted with grief, and yet they were still kind, they still smiled. They still foolishly tried to help anyone and everyone.

I couldn't hesitate anymore. Who cared about fear of death? I just had to kill. Plain and simple. Mr. Meridad misunderstood me altogether. I didn't save anyone. I could barely fight, let alone kill. The miracle that saved the frontier existed within it from the start. The frontier itself was the miracle. The people here believed in happiness, they strove towards it. Sometimes they even achieved it. But the price that they paid to get here was nothing more than highway robbery. They'd been robbed of everything.

So, I slice and thrust, thrash and slay, stab, beat, brawl. Cut the enemy to dust, cut, cut, slash, kill, kill and keep killing.

"Whew, sorry for the wait. Did I really finish last? And my path had the fewest puppets… After I finally managed to kill exponentially more monsters than I ever have before… It didn't even count as practice for me, because I just sprinkled oil and set them all on fire, but it's a lot faster than actually fighting. Like, by a lot."

Jiggle jiggle.

Fighting the level 69 soldier puppets was perfect practice for fighting other humans. *But I don't know, what's the difference between the Ultimate Dungeon's war puppets and the soldier puppets here?* The war puppets had

come in a phalanx formation, so I'd gone with a fire strategy. The soldier puppets were stationed around the floor, causing a chaotic melee. The war puppets had the better army, with large shields and lances. Nice! Those would be sold for cash. The soldier puppets sported swords, lances, and hammers, some large shields, and some armor. Nothing special compared to the Ultimate Dungeon. *These are for the general market,* I thought, but I still made sure to collect every last one of them. *These'll be good backups in a war*. Onward to the 70th floor dungeon boss we marched. *Could this be the final floor? This dungeon is pretty deep…*

DAY 59

AFTERNOON

We're supposed to understand each other's hearts, but I don't think we understand each other's words.

DUNGEON

70TH FLOOR

A PERSISTENT COLD nearly froze my feet to the floor. The boss was the towering, icy giant of the arctic: "Jotunn, Lv: 70." A massive humanoid nature spirit possessed of superhuman strength. Some believed that it was descended from trolls, only to eventually become a spirit…and if Slimey was to be believed, it was absolutely delicious.

"Gyaaaaaaaaar!"

I didn't hear any myths about it being tasty, but y'know, there was no reason you *couldn't* eat an ordinary frost giant—well, besides the brain freeze. But Slimey didn't have a brain, and by this point, neither did Jotunn… Man, Slimey really didn't hold back, huh?

Jiggle jiggle!

Wow, glad Slimey was having a good time. Those were jubilant jiggles of joy! I'd been surprised by the floor freezing over completely, but I could still move with Airwalk. Miss Armor Rep easily cut through the cold air. Like every other challenge, Slimey just ate it.

"The nerds would've had a ball, but this would've been dangerous for the girls," I said. Miss Armor Rep nodded.

If their legs had gotten caught and frozen, they would have died. The ice-spear-wielding giant took a pummeling and then got devoured, but it was still stronger than my level 100+ classmates. A strong, fast giant made of ice and wrapped in magic, wearing icy, deadly cold armor. Its stats made it a match for a level 100 dungeon boss, easily. Possibly stronger. That was how broken it was. But strength was all it had going for it. Even if Jotunn

could surpass a level 100 dungeon boss in pure strength… Against two dungeon emperors? It went down like a popsicle.

Still, I felt like I'd finally gotten the hang of Magic Entanglement. I was able to move pretty normally in the battle. I didn't even get the tiniest chance to participate, but the upside was that I hadn't lost much HP. Normally, when I used Magic Entanglement, it sapped my HP whenever I tried to move. But just now I'd been able to move without a problem. Did I finally get the hang of it?

Well, tonight I would face more training (beating), and then I could try out Magic Entanglement in my late-night revenge session. Maybe it had *that* effect? Heh heh, at long last.

All right, let's get busy—just as I thought it, Slimey brought the spellstone over. It was a transparent, bluish, high-grade stone. This was a nice one. Fancy, expensive spellstones were too hard to sell, but I could craft a nice item out of it. And I had a load of items I was itching to try my hand at crafting. If I had any extras when I was done, they could join my spellstone battery pack. *Dungeons are the best,* I thought, *especially since going to war bleeds your budget. If you're going to go to all the effort, why not stick to dungeons?*

"Oh, a lance."

Even though it was a frost giant's drop, it was just a regular ole drop item of average size. "Eternal Ice Spear. Power, speed, dexterity +50%. Ice-type boost (large). Ice Spear. Ice Entanglement. Position Freeze. +ATT." About as strong as the average nerd's spear. This one was pretty good, considering not one speck of mithril went into crafting it. It had a long blade at the tip, like a lance with a sword blade. You could slice, stab, slash, or sweep, but each hit would drain a ton of MP. *I'll sell it to one of the girls,* I thought. Probably Queen Bee or that girl in the Book Club squad who's always knitting…um, Handicraft Girl?

Handicraft Girl taught me a lot about knitting and sewing lace, so I owed her one. But if it came down to thematics, then I had to give it to Queen Bee. It had a pretty good sting, you see. Didn't even know if she could master it, but I had to. I mean, it was literally her name.

Time to go down another level and test out Magic Entanglement. My actual level didn't go up, so I'd drill my skills. Even if I couldn't keep up

with my classmates, I didn't want to become a burden. That's why I'd been cheating this whole time, but I'd need better cheats moving forward. I had Magic Entanglement and Life and Death, but I needed something better. It was an endless cycle, but I didn't want to give up. I'd die before ending up as the girls' sugar baby! My three titles were already bad enough as is, I didn't think I could handle getting that one, too. *I never want to look at my status again!*

The 71st floor had snakes. I was good with snakes, but these ones were level 71 flare snakes. I wouldn't be able to freeze these guys. That made them perfect for practicing Magic Entanglement. My vision filled with jumping and springing snakes taking up every single inch of the ground and air. With no space to stand, I had to cut my way through, kick out an opening with my foot, slash through another opening, lower my foot, and rinse and repeat.

Well, I was certainly getting entangled, but that wasn't how it was supposed to go. My skills were all so sloppy. I kept entangling and detangling and making progress, regardless. I wasn't dead yet, but I wasn't able to manipulate and operate distinct motions. My movements were completely unpredictable. I could control the general flow of my motion, but I had a long way to go before I had any precision. If I could make Teleport or Gravity automatically activate, then I'd have myself a powerful new cheat, but those skills were way too risky. The best I could do was to stick to what I was already doing.

But using Entanglement to activate Life or Death was tough. Any mistake would take my arm straight off! I had Revival, so it'd grow back, but still, an arm and a leg is a pretty steep price to pay just to stay competitive. "I kind of get why Class Rep and the others are trying so hard. I don't like the idea of them protecting me, especially at the risk of getting injured or killed. Nothing's worse than the idea of someone else getting hurt just to protect me. I get it now. That's it…I just need to be more charismatic, so they'll let me fend for myself!"

Jiggle jiggle?!

At least Class Rep and the others couldn't try any harder today—they were dead inside. Everyone should be satisfied to have taken out a 60th floor dungeon boss, right? That's why I felt okay sending them home.

Jotunn was a nasty one—if Ice World had successfully frozen my feet, I'd have been completely cornered. My classmates would've stood a chance, but they wouldn't have made it out completely uninjured, and, in a worst-case scenario, they could have died. They didn't have good enough equipment yet; it was better for me to take that on by myself. Except that fly. Like, to heck with that thing, seriously.

"Now, yoo-hoo, where are you, secret chamber? Tra la la, dee dee. Well, I know where it is, but I'm still a teenager. I gotta make a little game out of exploring. Especially Miss Armor Rep's deepest secrets, I love exploring those to the deepest, fullest…huh? I'm dead?"

Jiggle jiggle.

Apparently, I was dead. Her gaze said so. It was the gaze of a morning-star wielding monster. Even Slimey was terrified. Time to run!

"Teleport!"

She beat me up. Even though I risked Teleport and all manner of high-speed movement to escape, Miss Armor Rep vanished and reappeared wherever I ended up. It was like living in a slow-motion replay, her trouncing me, again and again. She was the goddess of beatings, and tonight I'd present her my offering! As I got beaten up and lectured about using Teleport, we made it to the secret chamber. Thanks to the level 71 flare kingsnake, Miss Armor Rep transferred her ire from me—now the snake was in her crossfire. The cruelly morning-star-bludgeoned snake and I regarded one another. An understanding passed between us. *What a scary moment.*

"Guess this dungeon really is devoted to equipment-destruction? Even though it's a shield, in this case?"

It was a large shield with a mirror finish. "Mirror Great Shield: Vitality, Power, Speed, Dexterity +50%. Total Resistance. Magic and physical reflection and absorption. Weapon Destruction. Ultimate Barrier. Vile Violence. +ATT. Defense boost." *This is nuts! It's basically a weapon!*

"And this will go to our dedicated shield-wielder, right?"

Nod nod.

Jiggle jiggle.

The nerd Guardian had a Halberd, so he was fine. Plus, he was a nerd. Class Rep sometimes took up the shield role in battle, but she had the Thunderbolt Chain Whip, a Mistress Class Rep-sama Masochist Girl, so to speak.

Which meant that this had to go to Shield Girl or the Twin Telephone Poles. The arts club squad wanted items with an INT boost, and I wanted to prioritize the vanguard, so I could power this up with mithril in the meantime while I figured it out. I needed to hurry up or I'd fall too far behind. This dungeon kept going…I'd made the right decision in sending my classmates back.

After that, I did a quick-attack whack-attack shellac-attack. Entangle, speed up, and charge. I'd figure out the rest after I dove into the fray. *Shit, the meatheads are getting to me,* I thought. But if I'd used my brain, I wouldn't have made it in time. The monsters on these lower floors were stronger than I expected. Miss Armor Rep and Slimey probably leveled up along the way. How were they still wiping out the monsters so quickly?! Their stats completely undersold their true strength at this point. Even a single level up made them leagues stronger. No limit to their potential. And they were having a blast while they fought, so there was no stopping them. They were supposed to be servants, but they sure ignored me.

When I asked them to leave some monsters for me, they nodded and jiggled, before instantly vaporizing every last monster. This time I asked them, "Please give me some?" and they agreed again, only to mow down and massacre the remaining monsters at an ungodly speed. So what the heck did those nods and jiggles even mean? Anyhoo, we finally made it to the 80th floor. And it wasn't even the last one! *...Just how deep does this go?*

DAY 59

EVENING

That's way too heavy for a teenage boy, I'll do anything to not look in that direction.

DUNGEON

80TH FLOOR

THE 80TH FLOOR meant another floor boss, and it was stronger than the weaker dungeon bosses we'd faced so far. Yeah, this sucked. A real nuisance. You couldn't even touch it.

"Don't get too close. You can't eat it until we weaken it, 'kay? It'll be bad for your stomach—well, you don't have a stomach. Maybe it'll be bad for digestion? Anyways, you don't want that inside of you, so just don't eat it. You feel me? I mean, I guess you will feel it if you eat it. Don't feel."

Jiggle jiggle.

I'd confused myself, but Slimey somehow got it? Okay. The 80th floor boss was a "Ground Cloud, Lv: 80." Not a crowd, cloud, but on the ground. So…a flightless cloud, like a mist? A cloud that didn't float was still a cloud, I guess, so let's go with "cloud." A thundercloud. A Ground Cloud with its whole body entangled with Storm, dancing with Lightning. Slimey looked hungry! Did it really look that appealing? I could tell by his jiggling that he wanted to eat it so badly that the Ground Cloud was a bit frightened.

Jiggle jiggle!

A jiggle menacing enough to frighten a floor boss. A gluttonous predator by the name of Slimey!

"I guess it's pretty scary to feel like you're about to get eaten. Suppose a level 80 floor boss never thought this was how it might go?"

Nod nod.

When I looked at the Ground Cloud with Jupiter Eye, I saw MP and energy rush through its core. If we could weaken the core, Slimey could gobble it up. *I'll peel it right open,* I thought. My Wooden Stick's Magic Skill Absorption had some sorta MP technique-a-mabob, so I could slowly chip away at Storm and Lightning. Miss Armor Rep had already cut away more than half of the Ground Cloud's body while Slimey acted as a shield for its attacks, slurping up one Storm and Lightning after another. *This is gonna be a clean sweep.*

"Was it tasty? You can have the spellstone if you want, but can you at least show me?" I asked.

Wiggle wiggle.

Slimey devoured Storm and Lightning with Gluttony after all. He also got Ice World from the Jotunn, plus Ice Spear, and Ice Entanglement, and Position Freeze. Slimey digested skills. That meant that after absorbing them, he actually powered them up into higher-class skills. He cycled through skills every time he used them. Now he had a terrifying array of them at his disposal. And he still had room left over!

Jiggle jiggle!

At this rate, Slimey would be on par with Miss Armor Rep soon. I doubted I'd seen anything near their limits. They had so many moves at their disposal that I had barely glimpsed their true strength. The fact that dungeon bosses and emperors this powerful existed in the first place meant that this whole world should have been destroyed long ago… So, how were we all alive?

That fly had rare skills too, but he refused to take a bite out of that thing? I mean, I ran too, and I didn't mind him not eating the fly. It would've been gross for all of us if Slimey was suddenly super into eating flies. And I definitely wouldn't want him to have some rancid skill like "Bug Juice" or something! *Who cares how effective it would be in warfare?!*

So, there we were, bursting through the vicious dungeon to the most vicious lower levels, finishing up with the secret chamber on the 86th floor. On to the 87th…were there going to be more than 90 floors? At this point I should expect status-ailment attacks, which could put me in total peril if I

couldn't resist a single one of them. I mean, I actually did resist them. But just imagine how bad it'd be if I couldn't!

I wondered just how effective my classmates' items would be at protecting against those conditions. My General Health ability gave me basic protections against status ailments, and then my equipment granted me an extra layer of protection. But how much could my classmates rely on their equipment? It was still crazy that General Health, which I figured would be kinda useful—I mean, I guessed I wouldn't catch colds here—had prevented me from getting a status ailment even once. And I had Revival, too, which humans *definitely* weren't supposed to have.

None of it made sense. At least I was healthy, generally. I don't think the radio calisthenics had anything to do with it. I did them every morning, sure, but that had to have its limits.

"I guess I was so healthy I even got Super Horny and Alpha Male? Certainly, those skills are healthy in some respects, but not all?" Considering the (various) beatings?

Wiggle wiggle?

There was a rumor that Super Horny and Alpha Male were the most useful and vigorous skills in this world. Hadn't been able to confirm it, as it hadn't even been seventy-five days since we got here. According to the old saying, that's the bare minimum length a rumor has to last before you ought to take it seriously. I myself had some serious feelings—urges, you might say; needs—around that rumor each and every night. Fingering, licking, and gasping to…well, speak of the devil! That's what they say when the person you're muttering about suddenly shows up in your face with a morning star, right? *She looks rather more like a devil than I remembered.* I mean, well, you see—*aaaaaagh!*

They talked about words being the things without wings that could fly a thousand miles, but there was no mention of *speed,* you get me? Now I was on my knees. Haste makes waste, and wasn't wasting me over this just a little *too* hasty? I mean I needed to use super-speed teleportation to escape her blows. Turns out the rumors didn't make things fly; I did.

"The lower dungeon levels are overflowing with danger, confirmed! Ow! That hurts!"

Jiggle jiggle.

I still didn't understand how I could see Miss Armor Rep's face turn bright red through her helmet, but that red was a sign of danger. Danger to my whole body and very soul! *How can I get that morning star away from her?* With that violent iron ball swinging away at my face, we approached the 90th floor.

But before we entered, I wanted to check something. It was the 88th floor's secret chamber item, "Entwined Branches: ?, ?, ?…" The eternal "?" item effect. A whole description of blank spaces. So many question marks that I didn't have the slightest clue what would happen if I used this tree branch. I mean, my Tree Branch became a "Wooden Staff?", and had since conglomerated into the "Mistletoe Sprig: Wooden stick. Staff power-up. Magic skill absorption. ?, ?, ?" By now it was a crazy cheat weapon, combined with the Heavenly Sword of Gathering Clouds: The Grass-Cutting Sword. But after all that, it still looked like an ordinary stick. Kinda super problematic when you compared it to the glimmering platinum figure accompanying me.

Of all the equipment I'd encountered, I've never seen anything that compared to her "Platinum Armor: Perfect Invincibility, Max Power-Up, Guardian, ?, ?, ?" Those ten Living Swords were unstoppable cheat items, I bet. But just the contrast in appearance to my ordinary stick made me look ridiculous. You couldn't even compare… No please, really, don't compare or I'll cry. Seriously.

I wiped my tears away and investigated the Entwined Branch. It was a tree branch. But it was a dungeon item, too… Trembling slightly, I held up my "Wooden Staff?" and the branch at the same time…and…nothing happened—huh? *Seriously?!*

My staff fused with the Mistletoe Sprig without either weapon fully merging into the other. That just caused more question marks to appear… wait. Was this the Seven-Branched Sword? *That* Seven-Branched Sword?!

It was called the Entwined Branch, after all, so it made sense for the new addition to also wrap around it in similar fashion. But because the Mistletoe Sprig was already wrapped around my Wooden Staff, the Entwined Branch wove in and out of the other two like the third strand in a braid, with its branches poking out all along it like the Seven-Branched

Sword. I guess it didn't feel like looking like the Heavenly Sword of Gathering Clouds, so instead I got a Seven-Branched Sword? Yeah, I bet that's what happened.

"Wh-what a terrifying weapon! At first it invoked such an intense feeling of dread, but now it's as pleasing as a lullaby!"

Wiggle wiggle?

I was more scared of my own weapon than any enemy of mine would ever be. And my "Wooden Staff?" had transformed into something unrecognizable. It was now called the "Universe Staff!" That damn staff was lying to me the whole time, not only about its skill, but even about its name! It'd only been pretending to be wooden!

“Every single thing in my stats is a lie! There’s no point in even looking, the stats themselves don’t even understand what they are!”

I had been suspicious of them all along, but they went and pulled another fast one on me. This further deepened the mystery of Villager A. And that diary… No, never mind. This was all going over my head. Some things were meant to be mysteries. But maybe the universe could throw me a bone and let me figure *something* out once in a while.

Anyhow, the fact that the 90th floor wasn’t even the final floor was bad news. This dungeon shouldn’t even be that old. When did they find the time to build it?

DAY 59

EVENING

I'm always hiding and lying, but after that bluff, I'm sick of it.

DUNGEON

90TH FLOOR

SOMETIMES, there are a few good words worth saying. Talking nonsense does make people angry, but I have to anyway because I need to talk to hear myself think.

"Pierce, *Mistilteinn*! You knooooooooooow—oh, oh, ah?"

Yes, my beloved Mistilteinn sword, beloved by all the forward-thinking, progressive people of the world. Or at least the kind of people who'd miraculously recovered from a terminal case of edgelord syndrome. That's a kind of progress, no?

"Well, when I said I didn't think I was gonna hide anymore, it was a bit of a bluff—that bastard really did hide! Ugh, I can't stand it, I hate this world!"

Jiggle jiggle…

Yep, it was camouflaged and hidden, still. "Wooden Staff?" was now a Universe Staff. And Mistletoe Sprig was… Ugh, this whole damn thing was so suspicious!

"I thought maybe I was being too suspicious, so I tried it out with a little bit of a flourish…and it was hiding *more*!"

Mistilteinn was a legendary almighty spear in Nordic legend. Mistilteinn possessed all the powers of the god of light, Baldr, in a single, heart-piercing weapon. I don't know where the name came from, but in the myth, the weapon was used to slay Baldr. But there were all sorts of other tales as well. I tried screaming.

"Glaring at me won't help my shock wear off!"

Miss Armor Rep and Slimey stared at me.

Hey, all I did was get into my junior-high goofus mode and strike an epic pose while striking with my new weapon. The target of my fun was the 90th floor dungeon boss, "Greater Guardian, Lv: 90." I, uh, instantly turned it to dust. I absolutely wasn't expecting it to destroy a giant armored Guardian with Perfect Invincibility in one hit. Also, it tore some major holes in the walls. Like, load-bearing walls. After just *waving* it a little! The Greater Guardian looked like it had some great equipment, but it still evaporated into dust. Now all I had was that dust and some glares.

Staaaare.

Staaaaare.

Since when did Slimey also master the glare skill?! He didn't even have eyes! Miss Armor Rep used to glare at me back when she was an empty suit of armor, too. Fantasy worlds truly were strange places. *And I didn't even do anything wrong!*

And because of the whole Mistilteinn-explosion incident-a-mabob, I lost a huge chunk of MP. My stamina bottomed out. This had to be a weapon of last resort—there was no coming back from using it. It just wasn't practical; I couldn't so much as defend myself from a goblin right now. I took a rest, gobbling down as many MP and stamina mushrooms as I could.

"I almost passed out," I said. "That's a kamikaze, self-destruct, self-obliteration weapon, right? Especially in a dungeon! You can't be helpless in a neighborhood like this!"

Nod nod.

Wiggle wiggle.

Even the dungeon-related parties agreed. They also seemed concerned about the property values around here. Monsters meant high crime! I guess finding this weapon was good enough. At least I knew what it did. It was far harder to control than the already unwieldy Universe Staff—meaning it was practically uncontrollable, period. By the way, Slimey was pigging out on the remains of the Greater Guardian. Have a blast, man.

I'd finally recovered by the time Miss Armor Rep and Slimey came back with spellstones. We had left my defenses to my three demon scythes while I rested, while the other two ran off and played, slaughtering monsters on the lower floors. As you might have guessed, they brought back a ton of spellstones… *Looks like the monsters were nasty ones!*

Jiggle jiggle!

"Hey, welcome home! Not that I'm living here yet."

This dungeon was way stranger than I was expecting. Really deep. Logging work in the monster forest had pretty much finished. I hadn't decided the next steps for logging so I needed to talk to Mr. Meridad about it, but that would take ages. Plus, when you threw in Royal Girl and Maid Girl, the whole ordeal sounded flat-out exhausting, so I had decided to let others handle it for a while. And so, I had my three demon scythes on me. Glad they finally got a turn to do something. Almost forgot I even had the Demon Ring.

"Were there tasty monsters? I mean, you definitely ate them, right? With that happy, merry, jiggling-wiggling dancey dance I can only assume you had a blast wobbling and gobbling to full-tummy happiness. Looks like you gained quite a few tasty new skills, too? That right?"

Jiggle jiggle!

He was in the munchiest and merriest of moods. He seemed happy, so I was happy for him. And now I had some MP back. Kind of a feat if you considered how much it took to drain my magic battery. Remember, it had easily handled building underground mines, giant fortresses, and an entire village.

I hadn't expected the Mistilteinn to be hiding in there, but it was a cool find for sure. And if I hadn't tried it, I wouldn't have known what it was capable of. My equipment was *still* lying to me.

"Well, I'm not sure why my equipment would bluff in the first place, but I certainly fell for it. What kind of crazy weapon lures you in like that? Why would it scam me?"

Right as I said that, I felt kind of a kinship with my own weapon. Anyway! Slimey and Miss Armor Rep went and hunted the monsters on the

lower floors and returned, as expected. Less expected was the sheer size of their spellstone haul. *Looks like they took out three entire floors!*

I decided to go to the secret chamber on the 93rd floor, barge in, whack the monster in the way, take the equipment, and head home. I was tired, so I could do the Appraisal later. *I'll take the gate back on the 94th floor,* I decided. The battles were getting tough, and my MP was low, so the Ring of the Destitute and its Lifesaving skill wouldn't activate. I didn't want to risk going into the lower levels without that protection, and besides, it was already nighttime, I bet. I was hungry from using up so much MP, too. Bottoming out MP was always so tiring.

"We're going back by gate, so no need to storm the 95th floor. Have just a couple more snacks, then chill. I already decided on an Italian-style cutlet for dinner, so let's go back and eat already. I'm starving."

This dungeon was so close to town so I thought I could hold out till we got back, but instead I did some sightseeing on the way back. After we passed through the cleared forest, the city was right there. *What a good location.*

In this world, your movement speed increased with levels and skills, so the extra distance didn't put me out too badly. I didn't see any horses. They were poor here, so they must not have that many. The poor duke of the frontier rode a horse, but I never saw any regular people on horseback or with carriages. I personally got around everywhere in this world by walking. And, on special occasions, by flying and crashing.

The only *real* wish fulfillment in this world came in the form of its late-night activities. Now *those* were marvelous things I had never experienced back where I came from! And with a *dungeon empress!* I'd never get that sort of overflowing fantasy anywhere else, that was for sure!

An explosive Archsage Vice Rep B was waiting back at the inn too—for "training." The ultimate challenging rock-hard trial for any teenage boy. Well, I promised her so I would, but that didn't make it any easier?

The gatekeepers let me and two dungeon bosses through without any questions yet again. Jeez, what kind of lazy outfit were they running? I'm super suspicious-looking!

"Look at all the people. Are they spawning from somewhere?"

Jiggle jiggle?

I swung by the general store, peeped into the armory, and, just in case, snuck into the adventurer's guild to get a look at the bulletin board (along with my share of glares), then back to the inn.

"I'm back? You know? As in…why are y'all glaring at me? We've already discussed what my role in all that nastiness was! I'm completely and totally innocent! I have no idea why you're glaring at me, even though I'm sure if there were any reason at all, I definitely had nothing to do with it! Throughout every hardship, through the vicissitudes of this uncaring universe, I have never once done anything wrong. Ever!"

They glared at me. Forty eyes, dead inside, pitch-black! There was no life in those eyes—not even a little. It's not like I went out of my way to personally hurl bug juice at them, and they still got mad at me. It was obviously the fly's fault, but who do they blame? And Miss Armor Rep and Slimey were pretending like they didn't even know me?! Why—they were as good as my accomplices! For the thing I definitely didn't do, mind you.

"Oh, you're gonna get it, we're seriously *pissed*!"

Aah, scary! Their dull, hollow eye sockets were scary. If a normal glare was like a laser, their eyes were black holes! I eventually managed to worm my way out of the lecture with "check out the Italian-style cutlet," and finally I was free. They had all finished their baths already, so Miss Armor Rep looked a little lonely as she left with Slimey to wash up. I wanted to join them, but I had a training session to attend.

DAY 59

Surrounded by twenty-one glares and nine meat-nerds, I never have enough to even feed myself?

DIORELLE KINGDOM

CAPITAL

ROYAL CASTLE

CIVIL WARS are the way an unstable, decrepit kingdom commits suicide. I could only trust my family… The great high lords were now mere puppets of foreign countries, and those foreign powers now circled like vultures at the periphery of our kingdom, in the frontier. That frontier was the only portion of the kingdom with any life remaining, and yet still they intended to raze it.

"Your royal excellency, my prince," called my retainer. "We have gathered new intelligence. I cannot be sure if it is entirely accurate, but it is the best that we have. May I have a moment of your time?"

Perhaps if my brother the king would return to his senses, we could break the deadlock. But we were out of time. That Duke Meropapa would become my enemy… How could my brother let this happen? I could barely stomach the thought of them fighting.

If my death by my own hand would end this conflict, I would happily face my end. But that would be the coward's way out, and it would inevitably be fruitless.

"So, you claim that an ordinary level 20 brat stumbled into a dungeon, miraculously returned with the dungeon boss's treasure, and then used that money to turn the frontier into a corporate monopoly?"

I had no excuses for Duke Meropapa. Only a plea that he would show forbearance for my foul deeds—deeds done for the sake of the king—and that he could, for the sake of my family, forgive me for disgracing it. *When the king fell to sickness, the despotic lords took over, and they targeted your*

life. Your family, Duke Meropapa. The divisions between those lords sent us spiraling into this chaos.

"It is only the rational inferences obtained from good sources, but we do believe it to be reliable. The other proffered explanations are nonsense—fairy tales. Heroic fables exaggerated and dramatized by braggarts and the credulous. All meaningless. The latest rumor is that he currently he has a guard of twenty beautiful maidens and nine indomitable A-class adventurers, and that he rents out a luxurious inn and holds great feasts every night. That he's casting coins about like a farmer sowing seeds throughout the city."

We tried to send a messenger to offer a compromise: that they keep the treasure from the dungeon boss, if they only gave us that adventurer in exchange. But Duke Meropapa rejected the offer and took deep offense to it.

"Why would the duke of the frontier, Meropapa Sim Omui, guard an ordinary—albeit lucky—weakling with such ferocity? It would ensure the frontier keeps their treasure. It would end the war. Why would there be any reason to refuse?"

The frontier's strategic resources should have been long past tapped by now. The great lords of this kingdom pushed Duke Omui's realm to the brink of death as the frontier fought the boundless forest of monsters without adequate weaponry. That they hadn't all been destroyed long ago was nothing short of a miracle. If Duke Omui fell, so would the entire kingdom, so this unnecessary conflict was beyond foolish. The idiocy of the great lords to continue to rob the frontier of all their wealth was enough to make me vomit.

"They are not protecting the boy, merely defying the will of the kingdom. They threaten us all by withholding spellstones. Rumors of a great fortress at the gates of the frontier only prove their bluff! If it exists, such a fortress would have taken many years to construct. Our reports say no less than five, judging from the scale of it."

They even built a fortress…which spoke to five years of preparation. It was almost impossible to believe, but if they did indeed have a fortress as well, there was nothing to negotiate. This would require decisive action.

“Can we even defeat the frontier army led by Meropapa Sim Omui?” I mused. “If they *have* built a fortress, it means they are well prepared for war.”

“We cannot pull out,” my retainer replied. “If we do, the kingdom will crumble; how will we even survive? It would be best if we could negotiate with them, but a divided country cannot sustain itself on war. We lack time. Our treasury is empty, and we risk defaulting on our debt to other nations.”

The answer to that problem was to simply cut the extravagance. The greed of this kingdom’s nobility was the root of all its rot.

“The Imperial Guard led by Princess Shalliceres crumbled before even reaching the frontier. How can we wage war if we can’t even make it to their border?”

We could still cling to the sliver of hope that Shalliceres might negotiate a solution—but no, that was sheer suicide. Even if we did somehow make it to the frontier, how could we stand against the sword of Lord Meropapa? He would lay down his life, if need be, to defeat the nobles.

Hence, our inaction. The lack of any clear road to victory between us and Lord Meropapa might be the thing saving us from slaughter.

“Our only choice is for you to switch posts with the nobles’ children who are currently investigating the state of the border. We stand no chance with an army of boys. The first prince Guvadé has sided completely with the nobility. If we ignore him, we overlook the root of this entire crisis.”

“Ignore him, then. Forget negotiating with the cause of these ills. Their boundless greed and dishonor lie at the heart of this; we shall leave the fate of this nation to their idiocy no longer!”

Those fools! Still, we needed to be more cautious of the second prince, who had yet to make his move. After him, the remaining heirs were young children. Someone had to inherit the throne. We wouldn’t have this issue if we could simply bring our eldest brother back to life. I knew that Shalliceres wasn’t foolhardy enough to make a brutal conflict worse by bringing succession into it. Perhaps, then, it was good fortune that she was under the protection of Duke Meropapa. Her risk of assassination was

astronomical. She was popular in the military and among the populace. It wasn't impossible for the princes to reconcile with the nobility, absolve themselves of their wrongdoing, but they weren't remotely interested in that. Inside our own castle would have been the most dangerous place for her.

"Do not move the royal army," I commanded. "Call one unit of the nearby force. Even if negotiations are meaningless, we must try to reach Lord Meropapa once more. If my elder brother cannot act, then I must. Even if it's too late, I must attempt it."

What lay before us? Death? How ironic. It would be a grand farce if Lord Meropapa led an uprising and conquered the kingdom. Thankfully, he would do no such thing.

"Military might means nothing. If Lord Meropapa will make peace, then the boy's head will suffice to seal that peace. But if we don't strike the deal now and bring the nobles to heel, our destruction is assured."

If our kingdom wanted a king, they could have given the seat to any of the Omuis. But the kingdom had already pledged its loyalty to another family, and so generations of Omuis served the kingdom in another capacity. Our line ought to grovel before the Omui family, to that clan that battled against the monster forest. To the heroic clan that sacrificed their kingship for the good of their people.

That is what made one fit to rule. We, the Diorelle, owed a debt of untold generations to the Omuis, but we returned their grace with vengeance. No wonder our kingdom was crumbling into ruin. We were rotten from the start: money-worshipping sycophants who sold our nation to the highest bidder.

And so, the frontier possessed the treasure and the boy. Our only choice was to try and exchange the treasure for the boy. In truth, our own lives would make for a fairer offer. We ought to have all been killed long ago. For this reason, my final deed would be to go to Lord Meropapa in my brother's place. I had no words of any value. So, I would bow and hope it sufficient.

"As for the nobles, it would be entertaining if we could finish them off by crushing them between our army and Lord Meropapa…" I mused.

“M-my lord, this is no time for such jest! If word were to get out, that you speak of the end of our kingdom, why! It would throw us into crisis. If you appear to support the frontier, they will call you traitor!”

Even my brother, the king, couldn’t stop this disaster. How could his brother—a man of meagre talents—stand a chance? And while the king humiliated himself, the situation festered. It would keep getting worse, far worse than we could hope to imagine.

“A traitor? Wouldn’t the one who sent an assassin to kill Shalliceres be the traitor here? We haven’t even the authority to start negotiations, and they’re taking it upon themselves to end them!”

The nobles’ army at this point was vastly more powerful than our own. The kingdom army had already split, with the majority of the soldiers joining the side of the nobility. We hardly stood a chance in a civil war. But they couldn’t defeat the frontier. The only hopes of heading off a bloodbath rested with that boy and that treasure. But the nobles, and the church backing them, had no intention of availing themselves of even that paltry tool.

“We have no other means at our disposal besides conquering the frontier,” my retainer insisted. “No means to avoid conflict. My prince, please understand…”

Were we to rush to the defense of Duke Omui, perhaps we would have just cause to crush the nobles. I knew that was the best way to protect our people…but I was surrounded by blockheads. And the nobles would never withdraw without getting something they wanted. But with all they might want and what we had to offer being wildly mismatched, even that path had vanished.

“Conquer Omui? That is your suggestion?” I snapped. “To conquer Omui, the heroes and greatest benefactors this kingdom has ever known?”

Did he really think we could defeat the frontier army, even if the disparate royal family and noble factions united against it? Those despicable nobles weren’t even looking at the frontier. Did they really think their army, which could barely delve into the shallowest dungeons, stood a chance against the army of the frontier? One trained on the roaming, savage monsters of the great forest?

“If we do not, we are finished,” he responded glumly. “The citizens shall lose their kingdom and become wanderers and vagrants. The whole kingdom risks being thrown into chaos. It is not about whether we wish to —it is our only choice. Even if *he* is our foe.”

Die for this stupidity? Do not mistake me for the other princes! *Oh, I will go! Go to Omui.* Unless I fixed this before darkness struck the kingdom, Omui would fall, with the kingdom swiftly following. Why did nobody understand that this crisis went far beyond the mere life and death of our kingdom?

“It shall be so,” I said. “I will go there, to my end.”

I would get the boy, use him to placate the nobles, and then enter negotiations with Duke Omui. Demonstrate the sincerity of the apology by risking our lives, and then use the boy and the treasure to strike a deal with the nobles. That would be my final act. If it cost me my life, that would be a fair exchange. Because if this civil war broke out, it would be the end.

DAY 59

NIGHT

They were not Slimey! They were actually Slimey's bubble bath friends.

THE WHITE LOSER INN

THE TIME TO EMPLOY my "training" had come. The very height of hardship. "Empty your heart," said Lao Tsu. "See all things flourish and dance in endless variation. And once again merge into perfect emptiness."

The act of emptying all thoughts from your mind and achieving perfect stillness in your heart. Returning to the root of your soul, no matter what happens in your surroundings. No matter what kind of vicious, terrifying, mind-blowing violence is inflicted upon you, maintain a still… wait, uh, even then? *Am I getting this right?*

Laozi had imagined a reflection of my heart. *Still water becomes a mirror and bares my soul for me to see. Maintain the course of my heart. Accept everything.*

But isn't it kinda messed up to accept something *that* bad? *This isn't enough?!* It—oh no, my soul was still seeing the sights! No, remain calm, don't lose it, don't lose it, get your empty and quiet heart and just roll with the punches. Just roll with it… This was *too* powerful, but I had try!

Take deep, steady breaths, and just exist. Calm, cool, composed—*I'm gonna lose it!*

Before I could settle my heart, a single imagined image—more of a motion, really—unleashed my dangerously disturbed teenage boy soul! In my mind's eye, I felt its weight, its shape—*it's heavy, huge, soft*, and those were the images that flashed before my *closed* eyes! If I'd actually reached out and touched this form, I'd be a goner!

Shake shake…

So that was their true form. I had to hold it in my consciousness perfectly! Maintain that perfect size, taking away nothing, adding nothing… yes. Yes!

Boing boing!

I reached out in my mind to understand the meaning of what they were saying to me. I couldn't understand. Maybe because this wasn't Slimey?

I held them without squeezing. I modified their motion, trying to understand their nature… *Hm*. *Still a little restrictive…*

Shake shake.

I couldn't figure them out. If I did, I'd be in serious trouble! Get your mind out of the gutter, not *that* kind of trouble. They were practically talking to me at this point, but the motion was the real problem. I had to fully and completely enclose them so that they could remain stable. But I had no means of testing it directly, as grabbing and shaking them with my hands would be too dangerous. There was no choice but to engineer this thing to lift and separate, just for stability's sake. I applied pressure, adjusted my design, and then once I contained the enormous mass and weight within that design, I kept compressing it bit by bit. Just adding a little bit of supportive, elastic tension.

Boyoing?

Was that a question? *No, these can't talk to me, that would be disastrous!* I'm not sure I could emotionally handle them being sentient. *How about this?*

Bajoop!

They want juice? Wait, no, I can't translate for them as if they're Slimey. They won't eat! It would be beyond shocking if they could. Maybe if I just—no, no, I can't start treating them as if they have a mind of their own. I was just projecting. They were just heavy; I was just tired. I had to clear my mind of evil thoughts. But no matter how pure my intentions and scientific my engineering efforts, too much time focusing on *these* would have a very impure ending, I could tell you that much.

That last little bounce seemed cheerful enough, so I supposed this was about right. *Oh no. I'm really starting to talk with them!* If I actually started talking to this thing aloud, everyone would think I lost it! They might even call the cops.

"So, is this isn't bad. You can kind of move around, but not too much. If you did jiggle too much that'd be rough on, like, my prospects of ever going to heaven. Y'know?"

Boiyoooiing!

So they agreed! *No, they're not talking to me!* Unless…?! Maybe I'd unleashed the power of their true form? Was that it? No, it couldn't be, because the person attached to them would surely have noticed before I did. Did she think I was talking to her?

"Yeah, it's, like, perfect now! Suuuper easy to move around. Way, way more comfortable than the custom stuff I ordered back in Japan! Can you just do it up with the design I requested? Thaaaanks!"

Seriously? I had to keep working on this in the dead of night by myself. All that work for a goddamn *brassiere?* What a fantasy! A fantasy way more out there than getting sent to any other world—a fantastic, fantasy-laden late-night journey for any teenage boy! But, like, I was already stuck in a fantasy. I wasn't sure I wanted another one.

"Well, it's true that as with everything in this world, form follows function. Every little decoration adds to the harmony of an item and improves its stats. I guess I'm asking, do you want your teen boy brassiere manufacturer to add lace?"

"Please!"

Unfortunately, a half-cup strapless bra wasn't enough to contain her destructive force, so I needed to add a strap. The bra was already the absolute minimum size, so it was *all* decoration…maybe I could make it a cross in the back to better support the center of gravity. Because I couldn't measure her. Like, trying would kill me. My spirit would shoot out right into the sky—all I could do was improve the design and add some lace ornamentation. Yep, this was my life now, I guess. Bra manufacture.

It was the only way I could stop Vice Rep B from killing me after she got that goop on her face; the only offer that could seal her disastrous

rampage. I tried the simple: “Calm down, calm down! Although if you’re too calm with that bug juice on your face, that’s also pretty scary. But listen! I’ll burn the nerds for you, so just calm down, okay? Although if I burn the nerds that’ll break the barrier, and your fire will consume us all. So just calm down? Please?”

I mean, I’d put her in a rough position. I was sympathetic. Despite all that gunk on her, I was seriously thinking about a few positions as her rampaging caused some equally serious jiggling.

Eureka.

“When we get back, I’ll make you a bra! Whatever kind you like, so let’s just go back. I’ll even add lace? But before we go back, let’s wash off the bug juice. It’s dripping off your face, seriously gross! So wash your face, got it? Look, here’s hot water.”

That did the trick. I knew the girls had been suffering from the lack of bras since arriving here in this world, but I couldn’t offer any solutions—my garment factory wasn’t up to snuff. Even Miss Armor Rep kept telling me to make some. Apparently, it was a big problem for the girls. But in a very important way, it was equally hard on me. The specialty magic-power-formed sports bras that I came up with weren’t enough to support those assets. They still moved around too much. *You can see the discomfort I’m going through as a teenage boy, right? My suffering?*

“Okay, so as general designs, choose one of these, ’kay? The decorations will also be structurally supportive, so they can transform as needed.”

“Wooow, they’re, like, sooo cute!”

You could say that telling her, “When we get back, I’ll make you a bra,” was my biggest mistake. I did also remember saying, “This is gonna be a problem…” Because it did cause me problems. Many seriously rock-hard teenage-boy problems. One of which I was experiencing this very second!

“Well, they’re all adorbs, y’know, so I kinda want ’em all. I’ll take them all, please!”

I didn’t expect designing a bra to be so challenging, though. I didn’t have any technology that could manage center of gravity while suppressing

movement. Distributing that weight still meant that the force had to travel somewhere, so it was difficult to engineer. My calculations always ended up leaving out some important factor once I tested them, so I had to keep recalculating. I never expected to come up against a problem that even Supreme Thinking couldn't overcome!

"Okay, you can take off the blindfold now!"

Jiggle jiggle!

"Hey, is that Slimey talking or what? I'm not sure if I can really take it off yet!"

Shake shake!

Just so you know, Slimey and Miss Armor Rep were chaperoning, so nothing suspicious whatsoever occurred. Of course, it was still a fantastic adventure into a fantasy world beyond my wildest dreams. But I did have a blindfold on the entire time, and used Magic Hands, so I never so much as touched them. Hands off! I'm a gentleman, I swear.

Of course, I had to wrestle with my Magic Hands, who had a mind of their own. After I'd stopped them from slipping and rubbing and squeezing and poking and all sorts of various other mischief, there was no problem! I just wished Miss Armor Rep would stop opening up my blindfold a crack? And Vice Rep B—please don't smile at me like that when our eyes meet? And quit moaning like that whenever I adjust the measurements?

"Make me matching bottoms too, 'kay?" she said. "If you get stuck, feel free to measure me, like, any time at all. Thanks, Haruka-kun! Whoop!"

The door closed with a clap. Vice Rep B left practically purring. Or was it jiggling? Hang on, now I had to make her bottoms, too? That meant panties, right?

Word would spread to the other girls, and fast. I didn't know how fast, but it was inevitable. They had a girls' meeting in the bath every single day *and* they shared a giant room. I'd made Miss Armor Rep one too, because she wanted one, and Miss Armor Rep would definitely show hers off to the other girls. There were nineteen of them and only one of me…

I had a lot of work to do that night. But I tried my most conscientious best. And Miss Armor Rep also asked for a set of garter stockings to go with her matching sexy lingerie? *Yikes!* But I gave it my all!

DAY 60

MORNING

If your ambition is sightseeing, then I'll just call in a tour guide?

THE WHITE LOSER INN

WE GOT A REPORT from Stalker Girl the next morning. The prince of the kingdom had gathered an army to lead an attack on the frontier, and that army was making its way here. Apparently Royal Girl tried to go stop them, and now the duke's palace was in an uproar. I'd planned to go collect the massage chair money, but it seemed best to stay away for now. What a shame. I would go every day if I got to see that astounding, confounding sexy dress! Sadly, I'd heard from the general store lady that Royal Girl had bought ordinary clothes since then and ditched her sultry outfit altogether.

"Why are they so slow?"

"Well, they're an army of low-level soldiers without any high-speed movement abilities. It only makes sense that they're slow."

"But it shouldn't take them more than ten days."

"Yeah, that's seriously slow!"

"I got bored of waiting for them after the first three days."

"They're so slow that they're gonna forget why they came here by the time they arrive. I mean, *I* don't remember."

Despite the way they had to relay information from source to source, information from Stalker Girl's clan always arrived within three days, maybe five at most. But two more weeks until the arrival…that was practically a leisurely stroll. Were they sightseeing along the way? *I wanna join!* Maybe they've got a cute bus guide? No, a two-week bus tour at that pace was pretty impractical. *Oooh, I know!* I'd dress up Miss Armor Rep like a bus guide and go on a magical heavenly trip straight to Desire and Passion City tonight!

“Helloooo? Haruka-kun? We’re listening to a report about military operations, and you just pumped your fist and muttered ‘we’ll do it in a bus guide outfit, hell yeah!’? What are you *talking* about? That doesn’t sound like a strategy at all. There aren’t even buses in this world, and you probably shouldn’t make one. And even though I don’t know what you’re talking about, I can tell you did something wrong…because you’re already on the ground begging for mercy!”

“Why do the boys look so sad all of a sudden?” the girls shouted.

“I’ll never understand boys!”

They used to say that the enemy of your enemy is your friend, but all my friends were my enemies and they were giving me a concentrated bombardment of glare cannon fire. It was blitzkrieg warfare from all angles! I quickly came to realize that I didn’t have any friends. I needed a bus guide to introduce me to some! But even if a tour bus company suddenly appeared, what would the point even be? I’ve already seen the entire town. *Sounds pretty boring to see it again.*

The girls were mad at me. And after the girls’ battle against the 50th floor dungeon boss, they were angling to get to the 59th floor. That sounded fine to me, I mean, we beat the 60th floor dungeon boss yesterday, so that eliminated any issues. The most problematic possible predicament was that gooshy fly bug juice incident, but that was all over with. So long as I didn’t get dirty… I mean, they’d gotten all wet, but, you know.

“Don’t talk about maidens getting wet!”

It was well and good to keep going, but I was a bit concerned about fighting. That was because my “Wooden Staff?” had turned into the Universe Staff.

I already had the “The Heavenly Sword of Gathering Clouds (The Grass-Cutting Sword): A sword of gods. Tears apart and destroys evil spirits. Power, speed, dexterity, luck +30%. ?, ?, ?” integrated into my staff along with the “Dimension Blade: Can change the attacking distance with magic. Min Lv: 100. Dimensional slaying,” the “Elder Ent Staff: Increases magic power and magic control. MP +50%. Attribute-boost (large),” and the “Empty Staff: Super effective for wielders of Void magic.” It was way beyond any cheat weapon at this point.

Then I had the “Mistletoe Sprig: A wooden stick. A staff power-up. ?, ?, ?” wrapped around my staff in its ultimate form: Mistilteinn, the legendary spear of the north. This damn weapon had been hiding its true potential!

As an extra bonus, when I added the Entwined Branches I got the Sevenfold Slash effect. This weapon was a beast. It was like it started off as my ultimate cheat original weapon, got lost somewhere along the way, and ended up totally overpowered? Now I had serious problems with controlling it and managing its magic power. Just one strike with it nearly knocked me out yesterday, which could leave me vulnerable to monsters in battle—if there had been kobolds or mean girls there, my head would’ve gotten bitten straight off!

But my biggest problem was Magic Entanglement. Despite my low level, I managed to fumble my way through with that thing. Fundamentally, it enabled me to imbue myself with magic power, magic attacks, skills, even equipment skills—it was an all-around strengthening technique. But it was impossible to control, turning me myself into a human loose cannon. It was dangerous to my own body to move around in that condition! Every time I used it up until now, I suffered serious HP loss; every use of Life or Death practically tore my arms off my body. I had to train, practice, and learn to control it.

Those were the only weapons I had. Why would my original weapons be ultimate cheats, anyway?

“Who’s cheating who here? I’m the one suffering damage every time I use it!”

No one responded to me. I was talking to a staff. I’d be surprised if it *did* respond. Plus, after everything it did to cheat me so far, I wouldn’t trust a word out of its wooden mouth.

“You lie and you lie, and then finally reveal your true form. That’s not how weapons are supposed to work! What are you, some kind of ninja? I’ve never heard of a sneaky mutating weapon!”

But if I put it like that, it was sort of a teenage mutant ninja… something. *That’s kinda cool. I can vibe with that. Is this the friend I’ve been searching for all along?!* As I contemplated my new buddy, I left town and looked for a wide, empty space to practice.

“This should be far enough away, right?”

Nod nod.

Jiggle jiggle.

It was a wide-open field. I walked a long distance away from Slimey and Miss Armor Rep and started to practice.

“It’s like I’m performing an experiment on myself. Dang, I should’ve used the nerds instead! Well, the girls might have insisted on helping and I don’t want them in on it, so I just have to keep using myself as a lab rat. Why couldn’t this thing come with a manual?”

I took deep breaths and raised the Universe Staff in my left hand. *It’s time!* I activated Magic Control on the staff while ever so slightly feeding more magic power into it… *No problems so far…?* So, why was the Universe Staff gently pulsing even though it wasn’t using any magic of its own yet?

“Nothing abnormal. Even when I swing it, I don’t feel or see anything unexpected… Am I going crazy?”

Even after I gradually increased the flow of magic power, nothing particularly strange occurred. If I could keep it throttled to this intensity, then I wouldn’t risk exhausting my magic. That meant the solution to my Magic Entanglement problems were to just take it slow. A leisurely entanglement. That’s right, nice and…

Oh…*shit*.

If I make the wrong move now, my body will probably break.

“Fffoooooh.”

I took a deep, long breath and released Magic Entanglement. I was dripping in sweat. That was *close.* If I used Magic Entanglement and Life or Death with the Universe Staff, I’d be lucky to get away with shorn-off arms. If I couldn’t keep the area of damage away from my body, I could instantly die.

I couldn’t feel anything at all from the Universe Staff. On the surface, it looked like an ordinary wooden stick. But the pulsing seemed so much stronger than before, making it even harder for me to control. It would evolve into something different altogether if it grew any further.

“For the time being I’ll just try to move with Magic Entanglement and practice until I can operate it during a fight.”

“Don’t!”

“Ah, crap! I broke a bone! Yowwwwww!”

Jiggle jiggle?

Turns out I needed Miss Armor Rep to dress up as a nurse, not a bus guide. Hey, it was a practical outfit! Well, I’d probably make both. Professional interest and all.

The damage to my body was substantial, but my Revival skill acted quickly. My other skills would just break me all over again. Looked like the muscles I used tore apart, and my bones did a teeny bit of shattering.

It took us until lunchtime before I was able to control Entanglement enough to do radio calisthenics. I only *slightly* set myself on fire. And if I could do radio calisthenics, then a battle would be a breeze. Even with my complete control of Supreme Thinking, I still took a lot of damage from Entanglement, but Revival healed me quick enough to weather the damage and get me through until I got used to it.

Even restraining the effects of Entanglement, the results were incredibly destructive. The best effect was Magic Absorption, which sucked MP from kobolds that I clobbered. I got some MP back into my empty MP Battery yesterday by hobbling some goblins. And besides the boon of Revival’s speed, more importantly, I maintained control over Supreme Thinking. I kept good control over it even as it grew more powerful. Guess some skills came naturally to me after all. Here’s hoping that Loner, NEET, and Shut-In didn’t!

I tried fighting some weak goblins in the forest to test things out, but the low-level goblins barely served as fodder anymore. The only monsters nearby were goblins under level 5—a single attack wiped all traces of them from the very universe. If I made the wrong move, I’d clear-cut the forest, too, and possibly even innocent bystanders. Even with Miss Armor Rep and Slimey around, I couldn’t risk my classmates’ safety. Miss Armor Rep’s Platinum Armor had Perfect Invincibility, and Slimey absorbed Perfect Invincibility yesterday by eating the “Greater Guardian, Lv: 90.” He also got Rebirth from the phoenix he ate, so no need to worry about him. And I

couldn't hit Miss Armor Rep even if I tried, so I definitely didn't need to worry about her, although I did need to worry about getting whacked.

"Should we go back to the inn now?"

Nod nod.

Wiggle wiggle.

If my body couldn't handle the burden, I'd just have to up my endurance. Building muscles would take too long at this point, so maybe I should make a VIT-boosting item or something? I could also try looking for one in a dungeon. I decided to swing by the general store and the armory to see if they had any VIT-boosting equipment for the time being.

"What I don't get is that Magic Entanglement is supposed to be a body-strengthening skill, but it destroys bodies that aren't already strengthened! Why are all of my skills literally nonsense?"

Jiggle jiggle.

In the end, I only found "Tough Boots: Vitality +10%," but they were cheap, so I fused them to the boots I had on. Funny thing was, they were probably originally an extra piece of equipment that one of my classmates didn't need, and now I was buying it. I also saw an iron helmet, but having a metal helmet with a leather bag and black cloak was just too much of a biker look. I couldn't activate skills from metal items until I hit level 30, anyway. I didn't have much to work with, but maybe if I upgraded the ol' "Black Hat: Stealth bonus. Defense +30. Presence Concealment" with mithril I get could a boost to my VIT.

"It's a weird item to begin with, and I don't really want to waste any mithril," I said. "But I suppose it would probably work, and it wouldn't cost much… Okay, finished. Now just equipping it with a spellstone…an upper-class F-stone should do the trick, right?"

I crushed and pulverized a spellstone with a VIT-boosting effect, then used Alchemy to fuse it into my Black Hat. It only took two simple steps, but this was efficient for the amount of effort it took, and I was in pretty dire need of vitality to begin with. Made a few bras while I was at it.

"There we go, now it's 'Black Hat: Vitality +20%. Presence Concealment. Hidden. +Defense.' Those are some solid bonuses. And done

for cheap!”

I learned that I could even add enchantments into ordinary multicolored clothing. The Tough Boots wore out anyway, so mithril would just go to waste on them. Combining with my “Leather Boots?” was good enough. If I found something better, I could just swap it out, so it was a temporary solution. Who knew how this would actually go in practice? I’d need to experiment again. I was both a scientist and a guinea pig!

I didn’t know how I felt about jumping straight back to the 90th floor. Maybe a more mid-level dungeon would be better. Or should I progress my bra-making with mithril upgrades? Then the girls could go dungeon-raiding on their own.

As leisurely as I was taking life at the moment, war was approaching. Incredibly slowly, yes, but the top priority had to be getting in shape for that. And I was torn about what to do. Really conflicted. But I needed to find the strength within me to decide, with what time we had left, whether to go with a nurse or bus guide outfit tonight. Today I’d spend either working on equipment for my classmates, or honing my own fighting prowess… Both were necessary, but which one was more important now? *Yep, I think I’ll have to go with nurse…*

DAY 60

NOON

Why would I move again after my movement touchdown?

THE WHITE LOSER INN

I GOT BEAT UP AGAIN, but no regrets. She had nothing but a tree branch, and I had my Universe Staff on my waist as I used Magic Entanglement. I got beaten bloody. Like, bare, ragged, raw. I couldn't move how I wanted to and that left me at a monstrous disadvantage. But I didn't need to attack. I just needed to watch, give up, dodge, and swing. But I still got a lot out of watching her.

The branch-wielding miniskirt nurse known as Miss Armor Rep anticipated my dodge and hit me anyway. She wore a garter belt that suspended fishnet tights, dazzling me with a gorgeous display of blinding white thighs!

"Look, watch, examine, stare. No matter how much it hurts, no matter how hard she whacks, I can overcome it! Because I've got the miniskirt bus guide outfit prepared next, I—ouch!"

Jiggle jiggle?

Whack WHACK!

So went our marvelous back-garden training session. Probably our best session ever! Once she beat me up so bad that I was physically unable to move, I'd start working on equipment for my classmates. Prioritize your workload and all that. *Damn, I can't see her thighs from this angle!*

The world was spinning, and it weighed heavily on my body. The Universe Staff had compounded with my skills to multiply my speed even higher, so I was running around wildly, completely out of control. This wasn't even my Speed ability—I was moving too fast for my thoughts to keep up with, so fast that it pulled the world around me into slow motion. As time slipped, I focused on controlling my body, forcing it into the right series of actions.

“Grrrrrrraah!”

My body was vibrating apart and reviving continuously, strengthening and crumbling, over and over. I had to get used to it. And before me, behold! Miniskirt Nurse Rep in a slow-motion world. Movement, posture, breathing, pauses, presence, magic—master them all!

Ker-whap.

“Yooooooowch!”

Those thighs! A trap! I had to actually look at them to grapple them, but if I did, I was doomed! Those glorious thighs had yet to fully enter my vision, but still, their beauty captivated me. But that very beauty was a sneaky trap! Sure, I was the one who made her wear that outfit, but her legs were an unfair combat advantage!

“How about you go a little easy on me, let me get a little way in on you, you know?”

Shake shake!

I’d get by somehow. My offensive and destructive power had gone up in proportion with my speed. My ability and endurance, on the other hand, hadn’t grown a bit. Life or Death wiped out everything, sent me soaring way over my limit. All my base levels needed to be way stronger to be able to Entangle myself safely starting with my raw stats. They simply needed to be higher.

As always, I couldn’t keep up with the adjustments. As a result, my body self-destructed. I couldn’t keep up with my classmates either—they’d left me behind long ago.

After that, a sexy bus guide in a miniskirt beat the snot out of me until nightfall, but I had no regrets! I impressed the glorious image of her legs deep into my brain and preserved it with Jupiter Eye! The curve leading from her butt to her thighs was truth, the gleaming white skin wrapped in the stretched fishnet tights was justice! *I’ll avenge myself someday,* I swore.

“Whew, I’m tired, exhausted, barely alive?”

Jiggle jiggle.

It was getting dark out. Now to test out my skills in real combat. Real combat was usually safer than this. Certainly the mid-floors of the dungeon were—maybe even the bottom floors. I didn't think I could pick up where I left off from the 90th floor of the last dungeon, though. It was an unnecessary risk. Plus, we had already thinned out most of the dungeon in one big whack, so I didn't need to worry about a deluge happening.

"I suppose we better go looking for a more suitable dungeon. Sounds like everyone's back at the inn now, so I better get to cooking up dinner and profits!"

Wiggle wiggle!

But the moment I entered the dungeon, I saw…a picket line? There were posters and protest signs.

"Down with bra discrimination! Uncool, unfair!"

"Lace bras for all!"

"Additional orders: matching underwear sets!!"

"Pro-chemise life!"

…They knew. They organized a protest, dressed in matching cheongsams. *Uh…I sold those to you guys?*

"This is discrimination! You're playing favorites! It's not fair!"

"I swear, I totally didn't tell them!" Vice Rep B said.

I knew they would find out before long—but this was too fast! Apparently Stalker Girl sold the info for sweets?! *She really is unmatched at reconnaissance, damn it!*

"Shouldn't you be investigating the capital?!" I snapped at her. "Why'd you launch a secret brassiere reconnaissance mission when we've got a war to prep for?! And I made those sweets in the first place! I would've given you more to keep your mouth shut. Come see me first next time!"

"I can't sell you our secret sauce," Stalker Girl protested.

"That expression isn't quite as cool when you've got cranberry sauce all over your mouth!"

“Give us bras! Give us bras!”

“And matching panties!”

“Hell yeah, hell yeah!”

Thirty-eight glaring eyes, all on me. So nineteen underwear sets? Taking measurements…*nineteen times?!*

“But I know that the sports bras work fine for most of you, and it’s not like it kept you from protesting—no, never mind. I wasn’t thinking anything or looking anywhere. But you see, like…only those who need them…no, it’s not discrimination! Don’t you care about sexual harassment? Because making me measure you guys is sexual harassment? …Oh, for real? 100,000 ele per set? And a separate fee for chemise—you want me to make those too?! Well, that wouldn’t be so bad. But why in the world would we neglect to negate for a negligee—wait, I mean the necessary—oh! I see. Miss Armor Rep showed off, didn’t she? Which means you had a girls’ meeting over a negligee?! What are you trying to do with a negligee meeting? Huh, is that another maidens’ secret?”

(Negotiations ensued.)

Eventually, it was settled that I make them all custom sets. They even determined an order for who got theirs first. I got coerced by the sheer volume of cheongsam around me!

“You see here, having to measure all nineteen of you is going to be a bit tricky, a bit sticky. You know? I mean, yesterday I had several sexual conflictual crises. You see?”

“Who cares? Just make ’em!”

Yesterday, my magic hands measured with a jiggle-jiggle and made adjustments with a wobble-wobble, while Supreme Thinking calculated boing-boing weight with a shake-shake. *You want me to do that nineteen more times?!* (Forced measurement-taking movement seconded. Time to vote.)

And yet, an even more fearsome caucus appeared. It was the shapewear society. Their demands? Shapewear! With the fierce backing and support of twenty girls! “Make us perky!” Twenty—that was everyone?

That meant I'd have to measure their…bottoms, too?! And make them perky?

Well, everyone was bound to be hungry by now. Gyudon beef bowls were for dinner. But was this even cow meat? It tasted like beef. But the animal in the butcher shop didn't look anything like that… Well, whatever, it's basically gyudon.

"Big helpings of juicy meat!"

"Big, huge helpings!"

"Bucket-size helpings!"

"Extra scallions, on the double!"

"A bunch of servings, just gimme more!"

"Double-huge extra massive size!"

"And rice!"

Jiggle jiggle!

"Egg, get some extra eggs over here!"

"Splashed with bouillon, that's it!"

"More, more juice, dash it on!"

"Another bucket-size over here!"

"And here!"

"It's meat! It's really meat!"

"Yummm, so big and juicy, and yet, like, so firm, soft…"

I got rich. I got rich, but the dining hall turned into a battlefield. The line completely collapsed; people sprinted back to get more gyudon the moment they got their gyudon in an infinite loop of eternal, never-ending cycles of seconds.

"You guys are finished eating by the time you get to your seats! That's too fast! What kind of eating skill is that?!"

"Seconds, over here!"

"Delish!"

Jiggle jiggle!

They'd already emptied out four massive pots of gyudon—I only had two left! It didn't seem like they were even touching the eggs anymore. Instead, meatheads simply carried their buckets of gyudon back and forth from the serving table! I wouldn't be surprised if they were slurping down the gyudon without even using chopsticks. May as well glue the buckets to their faces.

Fortunately, when the line died down, at the very bottom of the final pot, there was just enough left for me. Barely, but it was there. Slimey stared at it longingly, but it was mine, got it?

"Just let me have one helping, please? I wanted to have seconds too, you know?"

Jiggle jiggle!

No, Slimey, you cannot have a little taste. Now the girls were rolling around on the floor with bloated stomachs, joined by a roly-poly Slimey. *Looks pretty fun.*

Did it make sense for me to measure their underwear sizes in their current state? I had the feeling that if I brought it up, they'd start up another boot camp. How did they always shrink back to their former sizes so easily? Radio calisthenics?

"It's work out time!" the girls shouted.

"Yeah, we gotta get measured for our bras!"

"The food was so good I totally forgot!"

Jiggle jiggle?

We dispersed and I went to take a bath. I didn't need exercise. I was already getting plenty of sexercise, and a mountain of beatings. The girls did look in much better shape than they were when we got here, but I couldn't say that aloud because they would glare at me…oh, they already were glaring? Forty scary, glaring eyes?

As I leisurely soaked in the bath, I used Presence Sensing to tune into the bootcamp and witnessed a fury. They were all level 100+, with

substantial base-state power-ups, plus additional bonuses from their skills. I could barely recognize them. Class Rep focused all her power into destruction with the Thunderbolt Chain Whip. Meanwhile, the Guardian nerd enacted complete defenses with the Halberd against Miss Armor Rep.

"I'd be impressed if they did another round of this," I said.

Jiggle jiggle.

The nerds had devised combo attacks, but Miss Armor Rep easily disrupted them. So, the nerds focused on defense while Class Rep used her indomitable whip to spearhead the offense. She feinted a jump attack and shifted into a floor-level swipe, sweeping out Miss Armor Rep's footing from under her. She was trying to disrupt Miss Armor Rep's movement. But Miss Armor Rep's footwork was super fancy—she danced through the air and across the garden. With her miraculous footwork, she pulled Class Rep into a trap of her own.

That was the last of 'em. She didn't want to keep Slimey waiting for his second bath round, so she knocked them all out. An X for every eye! She'd jumped to a whole new level of strength in a flash.

Miss Armor Rep looked pleased, so I supposed that meant they passed. Maybe I should pass out in our fights so I can pass, too? *Time to train myself to become unconscious at will…hmm, this is harder than it sounds.*

DAY 60

NIGHT

Apparently killing your enemies is second-rate. Not making them in the first place is first-rate, so they got mad at me.

THE WHITE LOSER INN

GIRLS' MEETING

LOST THE BATTLE, lost the war, lost consciousness. After the spectacular gyudon festival and its exciting explosion of energetic eating, we rolled on the ground in a state of sheer bliss…which was when we realized we had to get our bodies measured later!

"It's workout time!"

"Beach bodies, ladies!"

"Slim figures, on the double!"

We had to burn off the fat, convert those excess calories into heat, scorch every extra pound into the raging fires of hell! It was boot camp time! I asked Angelica-san to mentor us, and we got to work.

Well…I may have had a little confidence before, but it vanished instantly. I *had* gotten stronger. I knew I had. So, I challenged Angelica-san, wielding a stick the way Angelica-san and Haruka-kun did when they fought. But my pride led to my downfall in a storm of strikes that staggered me. I couldn't get anywhere near her. I knew that I wouldn't win, but I thought I'd be able to *approach* her. The gap between us was still so big that I couldn't so much as guesstimate at it, just that it was enormous. I threw away my pride and charged at her in full armor. *One more round!*

Without a shred of pride or excitement, I challenged her again just to see how she'd put me in my place. How puny, diminutive me stood up against her if I gave it my all—how much her peak dwarfed ours when she was as exhausted as the rest of us. We swung, we charged, we stabbed. She blew us away. Gleaming silver strikes danced through the air like falling

flower petals, cutting our formation apart, sending us to the ground. Her unreachable summit, the skill and technique of the dungeon emperor—from my own lower peak, I witnessed the beauty of a satisfied smile cross her lips. Then Professor Slimey came out of the bath to storm us with a storm of lightning-fast strikes. I was mentally drained; at this rate I wouldn't even burn all the calories I consumed today. But I had reached my limit. Everyone else was already unconscious.

"Great! Now let the siege and struggle against our body fat continue in the bath!" I called.

"Brilliant! Weaken the fat in the hot water, then go in for the kill!"

Level 100 was just the beginning. We all understood that now. True strength started now—I knew that much. We'd reached the level where our stats could finally compete. Here we had to begin our true training. That was why Angelica-san looked so pleased. Slimey kept on storming, though. *That Slimey somehow got even stronger, I swear*.

"Ker-splash?"

"Yes, that's a bath sound, but you're not supposed to say it aloud or anything…"

"We're definitely stronger and faster than before, but it didn't make a difference!"

"Before we had no idea how much stronger she was than us, but now we know exactly how much, right?"

Jiggle jiggle.

We soaked and scrubbed our bodies in the bath, doused our evil belly fat in the hot water. Conquest never felt so relaxing. And the bubbly soap was amazing. My skin was gleaming smooth when I woke up every morning, moist and glossy. The skin products were so effective that we all got excited just to feel our own skin. These were such sublime bathing products that girls would *want* to leave Earth and come to this fantasy world. *Beautiful skin is a girl's most powerful weapon, after all.* The soap was so miraculous that it'd washed away the bug juice from the other day in seconds, melting away all traces of the scent and leaving us clean and fresh. We began our girls' meeting in the bath, naked and dripping wet… Hold on, was I developing a yuri complex? *Whatever, it feels good! Don't question it!*

“Before we get started, I want to see how good it feels.”

“Yeah, is it really that amazing?”

“Oh my god,” said Vice Rep B, “I’m telling you, it’s, like, so good that nothing could ever compare? It makes you feel like you’re in heaven! Totally!”

“That good?!”

Vice Rep B had prepared so she could get right to it straight out of the bath—yes, I meant showing off her lingerie. God knows how much her collection cost. Angelica-san nodded as Vice Rep B talked. So, even the dungeon emperor agreed that the underwear felt good. Why was Haruka-kun so good at making bras?

“I’m so excited for a bra…but so terrified about getting measured!”

“Who should go first?”

“Yeah, I want one soon, but it’s so embarrassing to get measured first…”

“Yeah, I suppose we’ll all get measured in the end…but I definitely don’t have the guts to go first!”

“I want a bra, though!”

Everyone was getting excited. Haruka-kun at least had knowledge about modern bra shapes and sizes. He’d gotten a five-star evaluation from our resident bra sommelier, Vice Rep B, so we could expect good things. But should we place our trust in a teenage boy?

We got out of the bath, and looked at the two girls in their new underwear…they looked incredible. So splendidly gorgeous that they took everyone’s breath away. Their charms were straight out of a painting. The beautiful lingerie perfectly enhanced their bewitching, voluptuous assets and the womanly curves of their bodies, enfolding and emphasizing such pretty perfection with entrancing designs.

“You said the bras were *good*. I didn’t realize you meant *this* good…”

“It’s way better than anything you’ll find on the market, by leagues!”

“It’s so light it’s like I’m wearing nothing,” Vice Rep B said, “my body feels so light now!”

The bras enhanced their already stunning figures with lush, erotic ornamentation, conforming to their curves in maximally erotic fashion. Just how seductive and sensual could you get? So sultry!

“They’re so sexy, wow! You do kinda look like prostitutes, though.”

“But majorly cute at the same time, obviously!”

It was the height of seductiveness that could arouse delight and satisfy desire merely by being viewed. The design mixed elegance and licentiousness, each emphasizing the other. Pure magic. The florid ornamentation elevated their already curvaceous figures to high art; they had reached the true, unsurpassed pinnacle of beauty.

“I’m kind of getting turned on!”

“Maybe this really is a yuri complex? I can’t get my eyes off them?”

“Mistress?!”

“I accept your worship!!”

The underwear situation had devolved into a fiasco. We were hoping for something approaching modern bras, something at least with proper cup sizes, that would stop the chafing. But instead we literally got works of art. And the combination of Angelica-san and Vice Rep B made the perfect pair of contrasting models, bringing a lovely, gorgeous sweetness…and yet also steaming, sultry lust?!

“Why don’t you get some yourself?” Vice Rep B said. “The measurements take some time. Plus, like, the fitting.”

The girls stared around at one another.

We all wanted them…but none of us wanted to get measured. We wanted them so badly we were ready to force Haruka-kun to do it. At this point, bras were an absolute necessity…it was just so embarrassing! Peak embarrassing!

So, no one volunteered to go first. Everyone craved the pretty new bras, but we couldn’t stand the idea of getting measured and fitted. Because that meant we’d have to get cupped and fondled and that felt… *Pfshooo.*

(*Please wait a moment while maiden minds recover from this image.*)

We did rock-paper-scissors to decide.

“Now we’re alllll set!” winked Vice Rep B. “Now you’ll get squeezed and yummed and rubbed, *ahhhh* and squishy and rubby and swirly motions, tooootally swirly! And then after that—”

Now *absolutely* no one wanted to go first. Why was she moaning?! What the hell did Haruka-kun do to her?

“He ornaments the bra *during* the fitting?!”

“And then you just walked away with it on your chest?!”

Everyone stared at one another.

For acting so ashamed and reluctant, Haruka-kun sure did create incredible bras. Back in Japan, Vice Rep B tried tons of different companies, but nothing she tried was comfortable enough. She could only get bras custom-made by a specialist. Even then, she complained all the time about being uncomfortable…but *this* was the bra worthy of her praise?! Was bra-making Haruka-kun’s true calling? These things were works of art. And custom-made works of art, at that…so he took extremely precise measurements. *I’m not ready!*

According to Angelica-san, Haruka-kun devised a design that would distribute weight evenly with straps so that that the back strap wouldn't feel uncomfortable. She instantly felt like her chest got lighter; the bra didn't chafe at all, not even during battle. It was the height of comfort.

"But the measurement and adjustment process…"

"He squeezes, rubs, gropes, *and* shakes?!"

"Why does he need to *grope?* How does that help?!"

The bras were even designed to prevent heat rash. *That's it. He's found his calling.* This probably made him the best bra craftsman in the entire world. He could make a living off bra-making alone if he wanted to. He could quit dungeons all together. Bras were infinitely necessary. So, we had no choice but to rock-paper-scissors over who would go first.

DAY 60

NIGHT

Everyone's softness, stretchiness, and bounciness was one of a kind, so why were they two of them?

THE WHITE LOSER INN

A SEA OF BRIGHT red faces. I mean, mine included. And Miss Armor Rep, please don't make me even more embarrassed by popping out of nowhere and whispering, "Be gentle." Just stand there. *This is so messed up already.*

"Crap. I actually need Miss Armor Rep because she's in charge of keeping my eyes covered!"

Class Rep stood in front of me, glaring, dressed in a thin nightgown. She lost at rock-paper-scissors, apparently?

"Good luck! Now strip, strip, drip, drip!" hollered Vice Rep B.

"Shut up! Don't talk about dripping! I'm going to take it off, just give me a moment!"

She sounded pretty shy. Vice Rep B was supposed to be there for support, but Class Rep didn't sound too grateful for her presence. Vice Rep A and C ended up last…*do they even need bras?* I supposed there was a chance that a sports bra wasn't enough for Vice Rep A. Maybe she needed a full brassiere. If I suggested she didn't, this inn would become a warzone. But Tiny Animal definitely didn't need one! I mean, there was nothing there to support.

But this pair definitely needed a bra. There was plenty of something there. *No shortage here, her cups runneth over.* With Miss Armor Rep here as well, we probably had three of the top ten gathered.

Miss Armor Rep put her hands over my face, I sharpened my senses and started the measurements.

“I mean, I said this before when we did it for Vice Rep B, but you really don’t need to use your hands to cover my eyes too? Why can’t we use a blindfold? Because I can see through the cracks in your fingers every once in a while. And at crucial times, too.”

“…”

We made eye contact. Class Rep was glaring. *Stop opening your fingers!* I regained my focus and—using Magic Hands and Supreme Thinking—started the process. I had already perfected my technique and design process yesterday. I mean, I had designed something that could support *those* puppies, so the rest of the girls would be no problem. I tackled the hardest hurdle first, testing out all possible approaches. At this point, you might say that there was no bra I couldn’t handle! But if I said that out loud, I’m pretty sure they’d think I was a sex offender? *I’ll stay quiet.*

I grasped the layout as I began processing the 3D measurements. I perfectly comprehended the shape. Then, I investigated the weight distribution and the tensile strength. To be blunt, I squeezed and shook them. Then I created the base structure for the bra, fitted and made adjustments, did my little tweaks…no cracks in Miss Armor Rep’s fingers. Uniform pressure achieved, weight evenly distributed, crimping and chafing avoided! I checked each factor and made necessary adjustments, occasionally recalculating and reshaping the base. So far, I’d only had a sample size of three, so I didn’t have a perfect analysis. Well, three subjects, but six samples!

“Out of my three samples so far, these are the most springy, so I think we can go a bit tighter?”

There were many things I didn’t yet understand in this world. I didn’t expect a sample size of three to have such variation. I couldn’t adjust automatically based on my accumulated information thus far—each sample contained totally different shapes, softness, tension, and elasticity! Each set was totally unique!

“Ugh, hmm…”

“Is it tight, does it hurt? Maybe a bit looser will be more comfortable and relaxing? Don’t worry, I’m not looking, I swear! Even the eyes inside my heart are shut tight, so don’t worry! You know? You don’t know?”

I had to cradle without tightness, suspend without restraint. These goals were contradictory on the surface, which made the task all the more difficult. There was no set answer, but still, I had to strive for the optimum range. Obtain harmony between the pros and cons, discover the balance that felt just right, experiment through mistakes to discover what was most suitable. The unique balance for the unique pair. Supreme Thinking had reached the limit of its powers, stringing together possibilities for optimization, then reconsidering through trial and error in an endless loop. *I think bra-making is going to evolve my skills.* But if I earned the Brassiere Craftsman title, I don't think I could ever look at my stats again!

"Oh, this works. Yeah…I think right now…yeah, it's fine!"

It was fine? Looks like the current situation and restrained without squeezing. Of course, I still had to modify the fit so that the cleavage was provided with good ventilation. I couldn't do it perfectly; there was still room for improvement, and if I went too extreme with any one factor, it would start impinging on the others.

"Can you move 'em…er, well, move a bit? Yeah, is there anywhere that's slipping, or tight, or chafing? This'll be the base design, so just let me know if there's anywhere that doesn't feel right. Try bouncing a bit? No, no, just bounce them yourself! If I did it, it'd destroy me! I'd go straight to juvie. And seriously, what's with the flat girls coming here? How am I supposed to solve the paradoxical riddle of 'flat' and 'cup?'"

She bounced them. I perceived the motion of the bouncing through Area Analyze. And as she bounced them, I used Magic Hands to verify the trajectory and make adjustments, sending every sensation straight into Supreme Thinking to process the calculations for the adjustments. Sensations that were bringing me closer to bursting!

"Waaaah!" squealed Class Rep. Vice Rep B burst out into cackling laughter. *Squish squish!*

Wh-what? Vice Rep B grabbed Class Rep's chest from behind and started groping her! The compression and elasticity of her compressed flesh soared straight into Supreme Thinking—the curvature, the shaking, smushing, and rippling, all of those factors warped into data points one after the next. Supreme Thinking adjusted its myriad calculations…well, and there *is* a rumor (which I cannot confirm or deny) about how Jupiter Eye

can still see everything even with Miss Armor Rep's hands in the way. I did my best to keep my eyes shut and not picture anything.

Boing! Squish! Jiggle!

Hey, Slimey, not now! That is, if that *was* Slimey. I couldn't tell who was saying what! The party was getting bigger now, I could tell that much with Presence Sensing. I wasn't looking, just sensing, I swear!

"Isn't this greeeat! It's soooo cute! Perfect piiiiiink!"

"Waaaaaah! Stop groping me! Stop shaking and grabbing me! Stop, don't look, Haruka-kun!"

Jiggle jiggle! Squish squish squish!

They were having a blast. Guess Class Rep and Vice Rep B were yuri pals, after all? But don't get me wrapped up in this! This is the room of a young and healthy teenage boy. This was nothing short of torture for a boy my age. But if I participated, they'd definitely get mad at me!

"Oh em geee, your butt looks sooo cute, it's so nice! Rub rub!"

"Stoooooop!"

The pink battlefield moved to lower ground. Both girls were members of the "Shapewear: Make Us Perky!" caucus, after all. All the girls had joined, so they all wanted shapewear, too. Just how much did they intend to torture me?

"Ah! Stop it, stop it already, don't rub it!"

What fun! I had to steel my heart for serious business, however. Any more unexpected events and I'd likely die of shock. Because even if I tried to keep my mind blank, there was the whole Insentience skill problem, especially since it was the evolved version of Focus. Why did Insentience involve such incredible mental work? *Yep, this is going to kill me. I'm done for.*

…I died. I arrived at the paradise of Amitabha. A whole new world. Straight to heaven!

Well, via measuring, or, uhm, proficiency, I made the bras. All of them. Measurements with Magic Hands, as my tentacles explored an

unvarnished frontier to their hearts' content! I wouldn't be able to sleep tonight. Not unless I put in some hard work beforehand, anyway.

"I've already suffered critical injuries from making these bras. Doing the bottoms will finish me off, I swear. You can't just all stand half naked in front of a teenage boy with his eyes covered. That's too much!"

Jiggle jiggle.

Merely hearing the rustle of their clothes sent me to the limit. *I can't do this shapewear!* When I activated Insentience it was as though everything turned to slow motion—I could hear them take off their clothes in devastating detail! What a traumatizing experience!

"And there are two freshly worn sets of underwear lying out right there…for me to take to my room tonight to sew lace on to…thank you? W-well, not that you're giving them to me, I'll give them back, obviously. Okay?"

A red-faced Class Rep sat down, completely exhausted, and Vice Rep B carried her out of the room on her back. Was using Magic Hands a bit too much of a shock? That made sense, since they were powerful enough to knock out a dungeon emperor. That actually made it pretty impressive that Vice Rep B was the only one who stayed calm! Was I really going to do this every night from now on? *This fantasy world seems pretty unrealistic!*

First up: the ornamentation. I also needed to power up the Eternal Ice Spear and the Mirror Great Shield from the last dungeon. Then there was the equipment from the 93rd floor that I hadn't even used Appraisal on yet. That turned out to be "Ripple Necklace: Resistance, intelligence +50%. Anti-resistance. Effect spread and permeation." Oh! Now this was something I'd been looking for. Dungeon raiding really was worth it when you got items like this!

But my gaze and attention were shifting to the bras. Decorating time! Now we could crush the kingdom with our hands tied behind our back. This was the much-needed ace up our sleeve.

Not the bras, of course. Underwear couldn't be the ace up anyone's sleeve, just physically speaking. Although if I threw Mistress Class Rep-sama into the middle of the battlefield in her underwear, she would

probably instantly murder everyone out of sheer rage. Better avoid that. Plus, she'd lecture me later. *That whip scares me!*

DAY 61

MORNING

I remade and replanned the trial product from ground zero. Now it's a brand-spankin' new and improved product.

THE WHITE LOSER INN

I WORKED ALL NIGHT, but at least I finished the new product in time. The underwear, naturally. It was a hard struggle, and it took all night long!

I powered up the "Eternal Ice Spear. Power, speed, dexterity +50%. Ice-type boost (large). Ice Spear. Ice Entanglement. Position Freeze. +ATT" to "All stats +50%. Ice-type boost (large). Ice Spear. Ice Entanglement. Position Freeze. +ATT," but the magic sword fighter-type mean girls were still in dire need of RES and INT. Then I took the "Mirror Great Shield: Vitality, power, speed, dexterity +50%. Total Resistance. Magic and physical reflection and absorption. Weapon Destruction. Ultimate Barrier. Vile Violence. +ATT. +Defense" and added "Defense boost (ultra)," "Autoheal," and "Super-speed." *Now, who should I give it to?*

Lastly, I improved the "Ripple Necklace: Resistance, intelligence +50%. Anti-resistance. Effect spread and permeation" with "Complete Attribute Enhancement (ultra)," turning it into a top-class weapon: anti-resistance with complete immunity, skill-absorption, and permeation. This would give its wielder the power to inflict status ailments en masse, the potential to overturn a disadvantage on the battlefield instantly. This should definitely go to someone in an arts club, but who? Well, Book Club President, obviously. And then the underwear…I didn't need to think about who to give *that* to. *First, I'll consult with Class Rep about distributing the equipment, since she might have her own thoughts as the commanding commander, and I'll drop off her underwear while I'm at it?*

We had a morning meeting at breakfast. I had to start with the most dangerous equipment first: "Raw Undies (tops and bottoms): Undressed. Second-hand. Minus My Sex Appeal." Lots of glares and tears from first

thing in the morning. Had the tentacle Magic Hand examination left her traumatized? She was absolutely quaking yesterday.

"Morning Class Rep, still Class Rep as always, eh? So how about some secondhand Raw Undies, I improved them, adjusted them, and decorated them, so try 'em on? I even worked in the lace power-ups and shapewear perk-ups, so just lemme know if something feels wrong! But they can only stretch so far, so don't expand too much horizontally, got it? Seriously!"

Actually, I remade and replanned the shapewear shorts last night from ground zero, so now I had a brand-spankin' new and improved product, but that's our secret. It was seriously pretty great, although nothing's supposed to be perfect on the first try. So…yeah! Let's just keep quiet about it, 'kay?

"Good morning! Don't be dirty! And horizontal growth is the enemy of all maidens, so don't worry. And I've been Class Rep every day so far, so why would that have changed?"

Mistress Class Rep-sama, you've got your whip at the ready, so where's the spandex bondage gear? We all know you're an M, but you keep playing a switch. Anyway, I explained to her the new products, and we decided to let the mean girls and Art Club girls decide who got the spear. The problem was the shield.

"Heeeeey, Shield Girl? Yeah, this is serious, but I heard you're trying to get promoted to Shield Rep! Or like, you should. You've got my vote, so it's in the bag!"

"Huh? Shield Rep?"

I took some time explaining the role to her, showing her the Mirror Great Shield, which she was shocked and reluctant to accept. The only catch: there were two conditions that came along with Shield Girl's unanimous election to Shield Rep.

The first one was to not die, because if the person protecting everyone else died then everyone else was a guaranteed goner. The next condition was to protect everyone. She just needed to keep doing what she had been doing so far, essentially. That was why all the girls agreed that Shield Girl was the one who deserved this piece of equipment.

And the conditions were in *that order* too, with #1 taking precedence over #2. So, protect everyone *without* dying, I mean. Shield Girl used her body as a shield sometimes, getting thrown all over the place, so she needed to hear that one. Just how many times did she save everyone else's lives? The only reason no girls had died so far, and no one had even suffered a grave injury, was Shield Girl.

It was no surprise that they chose her. When someone was in danger, she rushed in between them, throwing her body and shield into the fray. No matter how many blows she suffered, she always charged in with her shield at the ready. The girls had all benefitted from it firsthand. They all knew Shield Girl was the one. I asked everyone and got the same answer every time. She was one of my most precious auction customers, by the way. All the girls just automatically said, "Shield Girl deserves it." Gratitude to her for protecting them up until now, trust in her for protecting them moving forward, and concern about her protecting herself. That's why we made her promise to protect herself above all others as she continued to fling herself into danger's path—otherwise, no Mirror Great Shield. After I told her that the whole class insisted upon those two conditions, she finally nodded.

"Very well. I'll become Shield Rep. I will protect everyone!"

Great! We had our Shield Rep. And a feisty one, too! Well, that solved that, so I handed over the Mirror Great Shield, reminding her, "You can't do anything dangerous, okay? You can't make everyone worried." But for some reason, that just sent forty-two eyes' worth of glares right into the back of my head. *Ah, what a morning!*

It hardly bears mentioning, but I got a nice shower of glares from Miss Receptionist Rep, too. I rented out the guild's training grounds. A brilliant, beguiling flash of platinum armor was awaiting my arrival. She was way too excited to beat me up?!

In the dead silence of the world, the solitary sound of a beating rang out in the darkness. *Wallop wallop wallop wallop…*

That friggin hurts! I had developed some control and restraint over Magic Entanglement, so I could move in the direction I intended. Not perfectly, though. Whatever motion I pictured in my head, I ended up smashing past it and going too far, throwing my body into complete chaos. Such was the gap between our skills. So long as I couldn't control and

restrain Magic Entanglement, I couldn't keep up with Miss Armor Rep. So she kept walloping me! *Wallop wallop wallop wallop*… Oy, that actually *hurts!*

Training, noun: pronounced "*whack"* and spelled t-o-r-t-u-r-e. I ended up activating short-range Teleport a bunch of times, and eventually even I couldn't predict where I would end up. I had to somehow wrestle control of the flow of my movements and break them into manageable pieces… Miss Armor Rep couldn't predict where I was going! But then, neither could I.

"Tsk, why does using this require that I can't control it?"

"He needs to stop! He's out of control!" my classmates shouted.

"But if he does stop, Miss Armor Rep will beat him up."

Nod nod!

She agreed with them! *So, you want to play, eh, Miss Armor Rep? After our game last night, you want another round?*

Normally, movements this erratic should make it impossible to get ahold of me, but Miss Armor Rep was doing just that with her wallops. I knew why, of course. I used tentacles to measure all the girls while blindfolded yesterday, and all the corrections and adjustments made it a teensy bit difficult for me to sleep. Then, like the repressed teenage boy that I was, I woke up raving and ready for action. I went to town on not just the lingerie, but miniskirts, the mini bus guide outfits, the works. The final outfits ended up on Miss Armor Rep, which meant the bulk of her wrath ended up on me!

"I mean, especially *that* one, you were like a different person in that, and then after you got so mad you took the fitted dress and…no, nothing, nothing!"

Wallop! WALLOP!

She must be embarrassed. Last night she was into it, but today, a beating. Meanwhile, the combo of Magic Entanglement and Super-Speed sent my legs flying out of control. I had no way to stop myself, so I just flew through the air, getting relentlessly whacked at every stage. *Wallop wallop wallop wallop wallop!* I'd get her back tonight!

Jiggle jiggle.

Guess it was time? Miss Receptionist Rep came downstairs, doting on Slimey. I wanted to dote and get doted on too…*by Slimey, of course!* I swear! Of course, I also love mature women and large objects of all kinds.

Whack whack?

This place is too dangerous! Time to escape to a dungeon!

DAY 61

MORNING

I don't know if I can make the story a series, or turn it into a manga or an anime or a movie or a live-action film, but definitely into a porno?

DUNGEON

BACK TO THE DUNGEON. You know, the one where we had gotten to the 37th floor, then abandoned it. My companions? The ever-present *nod-nod* and *jiggle-jiggle.*

We were still only halfway down, so I would've been fine without them. There they were, though. Did Servitude mean they had to be with me at all times? Speaking of which, I got the feeling that the mean girls were standing behind me in the inn a lot, so maybe that was another effect? I couldn't get rid of Servitude on them myself, but for some reason they didn't seem to want to be freed. I heard that they were trying to repay their debt to me, but "the mean girls' debt" sounds more like a porno than an anime or live-action title, know what I mean?

The monsters were as slow as ever, so they didn't make for good practice. To be honest, though, right now what mattered was for me to keep practicing Magic Entanglement, accumulate data, and let Supreme Thinking figure out how it actually worked until I could control it. It was more of a street skill than a cheat skill. A preposterous grab bag of skills, all activated at the same time, which made it easy to screw up. Even when functioning perfectly, it was impossible. If I ever really lost it, the results could be fatal.

"Well, we're dealing with a repeating loop of self-destruct and Autoheal, so I'll have one helping of my bones and muscles shearing apart with a side of simultaneous recovery, please? Hmm, delicious!"

"Don't use…stop it!"

Jiggle jiggle.

My recovery speed had shot up, so I could heal even in the middle of a battle. I could fight no problem so long as I didn't suffer any heinous injuries from the enemy. Getting my legs broken always sucked. Losing speed in the middle of a group of monsters was pretty bad, and so did risking getting my head bitten off. Still…

"How strong are these level 38 bound dogs? They cryin' all the time?"

Doggo doggo!

Hey, they ain't nothin' but bounding doggos, so I could just strengthen my fists and punch 'em. Or use the Universe Staff, so long as I whacked 'em hard enough. No problem. We killed them all, easy peasy. Slimey turned red as he activated his Inferno magic…dinner time! Now *those* were some hot dogs. Slimey was in a great mood, jumping all over the place, I supposed that was only natural if you had the Leap skill after eating a pack of dogs with the same skill. The floor was low, so watching him jump around was like watching pinball. He was pinging and ponging off the walls as he jiggled and wiggled. Looked pretty pleased. The doggies that got torn apart by his rapid-fire ping-pongs were, by contrast, not in great shape.

"Miss Armor Rep, help me? I can't really move. I thought I had gotten used to it, but apparently not yet. I'm kind of being a nuisance. Just a big old gruesome nuisance. Y'know?"

Nod nod.

She got me. If she really felt like I was a gruesome nuisance, she wouldn't have nodded, obviously. I had an idea about some things she would find a nuisance tonight, and some things she'd find gruesome, too…

It was just impossible, really, controlling that repeating cycle of Teleport for instantaneous movement, using Lightspeed and Dash to enter a state of high-speed motion and activate movements accordingly. So maybe I had to throw out everything I knew about it—start backwards at the destinations, keep everything consistent, and go all out. That was how Slimey did his pinball trick navigation: defining the vector by its destinations, and then calculating my movement and subsequent attack based off of where the enemy would be. Basically, hack the kill into reality.

I tried it myself, but I didn't get it. It seemed to take care of some of the problems, but if I attacked straight on for a downhill blow, the monsters would easily move out of the way of my straightforward line, right? Should I just combine a slash attack into Teleport? But I didn't understand my own place in space, either. Was it better to approach monsters from behind? I knew I had to hack the kill, but nothing else made sense. My attacks were only grazing them.

"It's like I'm using the Vanish skill that those wolves had before?"

"But…that's why…keep getting hurt."

Wiggle wiggle.

I was barely scratching them with my short-range Teleportation attacks, disappearing for a fraction of a second, soaring across empty space, no sense of where I was. I left the analysis to Supreme Thinking, so maybe Supreme Thinking understood what was going on, but my thoughts couldn't keep pace. So I fought in a nonsensical way, slashing away mindlessly.

"If any of them countered me, I'd die, right?"

"That's why. Have to…practice, so you don't…have to use."

So, I inexplicably wiped out the flock of level 40 swipe swallows on the 40th floor. No idea how I did it, but I did. I took them out with a diagonal slash from below. Huh? Well, the swipe swallows were the ones who got swiped. And I was no expert at swiping. That required subtle sleight of hand, and even in my late nights I was more about rampaging force than subtle swipes?

But Miss Armor Rep was nodding along with my attacks. I was doing something right! Slimey jiggled. I don't think he was watching me. The swallows must've tasted good, but he definitely didn't need the skill Swallow. He could already do that.

On the 44th floor, there were mithril golems. First I'd seen in a while. If I used the Universe Staff, they'd disintegrate into nothingness, which would be a real waste, so Miss Armor Rep slashed them apart with perfect precision. Slimey ate his fill too, but you probably took that for granted.

"Thanks, I'll leave the taking apart to you guys."

Nod nod.

Jiggle jiggle.

I had no memory of giving Slimey a mithril powered-up weapon, but he occasionally used mithril spears and swords when fighting. Which meant that he grew mithril weapons inside of his own body, which was why we let him eat the mithril golems. Maybe when he turned silver during battles, that was the mithril activating. Super useful, and what's more, he seemed to enjoy the flavor. *How can that not cause a stomachache, though?* I had a mithril stock now, anyhow, so…no problem.

"I might just have to keep failing until I grasp these weirdly eerie, nearly spiritual attack combos correctly…no way, that's impossible!"

Learning how to use the ridiculous Life or Death had been much safer. The only barrier back then was that I didn't have a clue what I was doing. Although, to be totally honest, I *never* knew what the hell I was doing, so I guess it was par for the course? Was that really acceptable for *battle*, though?

"You need…both, Life, Death," Miss Armor Rep said.

Both? I needed life and death. Well, I did already have Life *or* Death, but at the same time? That sounded pretty tough. Either way, she'd beat the crap out of me, so what difference did it make?

I found a secret chamber, so I checked it out and found the: "Wrathful Zweihänder. Power +60%. Rampage. +ATT. –Intelligence." It was a meat clever—sorry, *cleaver* kinda sword! That level of meatheadedness could suit no one but the meatheads. Unfortunately, I suspected if they got any more meatheaded they'd lose the ability to understand human speech.

"Well, they're already stupid. As of now they respond to words, even if they don't always get the meaning. So what's the difference?"

Nod nod.

Jiggle jiggle.

And this cleverness cleaver was giant. Big as a person, one of those legendary 1.8-meter longswords. This one, actually, was more than two. Plus, it had Rampage. How could you get any more meatheaded than that…? Surely, rampaging with this would be better than running around with boomerangs.

“Now we’re in the solid mid-section of the dungeon. Although it’s not like the lower levels get any harder for you two.”

Jiggle jiggle!

Whatevs. I knew how this would end based on prior experience: a hearty *thanks for the meal!* If delicious monsters didn’t pop up for Slimey, I’d make him a snack. *Time to move.*

Jiggle jiggle.

“D-don’t tell me you want tasty monsters *and* a snack? That’s an eating rampage!”

I always ended up spoiling Slimey, even in the dungeons. I couldn’t help it. I always kept in mind how Slimey was starving when we met him because there was no source of magic power to satisfy his hunger. He would’ve eaten up the entire class if I hadn’t stopped him, I bet. That would’ve been problematic! I just wanted him to be able to eat his fill. First thing, eat the downstairs monsters. After that, snack time.

DAY 61

MORNING

These weirdly eerie, nearly spiritual attacks are draggin' me down.

DUNGEON

45TH FLOOR

MAGIC ENTANGLEMENT prevented me from moving my body. The skill was overruling my mind's direct orders! I really hated that skill. What kind of skill makes its own decisions like that?

"Could it be stopping me from doing anything too dangerous? But if it stops me from moving in the middle of a fight, I'll die…"

Jiggle jiggle.

It was only like that because Magic Entanglement was a fearsome bundle of skills stacked, wrapped, and strung together in the first place. Maybe it wasn't a natural combination, or the different skills didn't get along well. Or they had relationship problems and needed to see other people. Something like that?

"My skills are fighting one another! I can't be expected to arbitrate between my own skills!"

Now that I was standing there, frozen, the monsters that lurked within the holes all around the 45th floor—"Carnivorous Moles, Lv: 45"—were poised, ready to strike…wait, no. They all got devoured.

"Any intervention from Slimey means a meal, huh?"

Jiggle jiggle!

The moles were carnivorous, but they'd ended up being one step lower on the food chain than they were expecting. I didn't get a proper look, so all I saw from Appraisal was their name, but I could assume a little earth-skill was enough to give Slimey a good snack. Eating dirt didn't sound very nutritious, though.

“Forget carnivorous moles, we’ve got a carnivorous Slime!”

Now let’s hurry on—maybe we can finish by lunch? At first, I thought this dungeon had fifty floors, but it might be a little deeper. I’d spotted no secret chambers on *this* floor, however, and there was nary a drop item to be found.

“I guess I came straight here from training, so none of that was a big deal. The only stand-out fact that bothers me is how boring it is in here. Hello? Yoo-hoo, ghosties!”

Jiggle jiggle!

We had some thunder-type ghosts on the 49th floor: “Lightning Wraiths, Lv: 49.” They sounded cool, but they died fast. A little splash of water and they short-circuited. Then they flumped on to the ground, where Slimey gobbled ’em up. He turned yellow as he ate. *What do I do if he turns into Pikachu?*

There had been a secret chamber on the previous floor. Inside I found a “Warrior Scale. Vitality, power, speed +30%. Athletic improvement (large). Armor penetration,” another pretty solid meathead item. I needed the athletic and vitality boosts, so I combined it into my leather clothing. *This better not make me a meathead!*

Now my body could handle a bit more stress. Not much, in the grand scheme of things, but a big boost relative to what I had before. I could rely on items for increased vitality. Who knew what would happen with Entanglement in the picture? I was in trouble so long as I couldn’t fight straight on, though. Especially with Shield Girl’s evolved form (Shield Rep) around, I couldn’t show any weaknesses. She’d go flying across the room to protect me. I had to show strength, even if it *was* just bravado.

“Is the next floor the last one? It’s pretty big, so is the dungeon boss a giant? I get the sense that it’s nothing special. No need to overthink it, right?”

Nod nod.

Jiggle jiggle.

Looked like we were all good. The 50th floor dungeon boss was nothing special. But we couldn’t be sure it wasn’t another deviant specimen

like Slimey.

It was big, but it used magic? “Nightmare Goat, Lv: 100.” It was a black goat at level 100 with incredible stats. It had a mountain of status-ailment-inflicting skills, plus an original skill, Nightmare. You’d be in trouble if you couldn’t resist that. It looked like a sort of demonic devil-goat, standing on two giant legs with twisted horns. But never mind all that—Slimey was heading straight for supper!

“You can eat the spells, but don’t eat the abnormal conditions. Those seem nasty,” I called.

Slimey wiggled.

A black mist started to gather and form into blades. *Is this the Nightmare Goat’s black magic?* Countless shadow swords started to soar towards us. *Bet those’ll inflict status ailments of their own.* Slimey was attacking head on. I circled the right flank with Miss Armor Rep hot on my tail. *Let’s cut it down.*

My goal was to cut off the Nightmare Goat’s left leg. I attacked, not really using Teleport or any other skill. But then my body automatically activated Teleport incessantly, over and over again, speeding me up with Lightspeed and Dash. Without God Speed, I was still slower than usual, though.

“It can’t predict my movements! Well, not like I can, either!”

I arrived at the Nightmare Goat’s massive left leg and swung my staff with all of my force, severing the tendons at the back of the left knee… Don’t ask me how, but I chopped that leg right off.

Gyaaaaaaaaa!

Miss Armor Rep severed the right leg and…the *upper* right leg as Slimey tackled the middle. Slimey’s Wire Cutter sheared the shadow swords to shreds. The Nightmare Goat was still creating them in an endless supply, a ceaseless rain of shadow swords—I used Vanish on each one right as it threatened to land a hit, then blinked right up to the Nightmare Goat’s neck.

Then the head fell off, I guess?

I didn't even know what just happened. Probably Mistilteinn activated that level of power? Suddenly I had three times the amount of magic power that I normally did…thank God I didn't discharge it all.

"Nice work! No status ailments, right? If you picked some up, just put them back where you found them. I'm pretty sure you're all normally so abnormal that my normal is the only abnormal condition. Wait, did I just diss myself?"

Nod nod.

Jiggle jiggle?

The status ailments from the level 100 dungeon boss didn't affect any of us in the end. Miss Armor Rep didn't get hit once, much less by any status effects. And Slimey could easily dodge all of the attacks, but he would much rather eat them than dodge them. In fact, he was too busy eating the Nightmare Goat to pay me any attention.

If my classmates had participated in this battle, the specialized abnormal status ailment attacks might have been a problem for them. The real headache was the unique status-ailment-inflicting skill Nightmare, though.

I saw horrible visions: I was getting chased out of the inn with lectures. I was being lectured in the middle of the dungeon. I saw the inevitable reality of getting lectured when I got back to the inn, and that was most terrifying of all. Realistic nightmares were far scarier to my mind, I guess.

All right, time to have lunch outside.

"Judging by the sun, it looks like a little before noon? I used a lot of MP on the last attack, so I'm starving. Let's get some food in town. There are more shops than before."

Nod nod.

Jiggle jiggle.

They knew what was up. We went back to town and walked down the main street. It was lively with bustling food stalls. When I first arrived here, everyone in the city was desperately trying to put on fake smiles. Now, the laughter was real. It was a town that tried to put on a happy face through so

much misery, and this new, genuine joy felt a little out of place. The streets overflowed with shops and merchandise, and all the people passing by had big smiles on their faces.

"Any places that catch your eye?" I asked. "I got money today, so we can go decadent, if you want."

We browsed the various food stands and restaurants as we walked. This was a real day out in the city! We waffled over which to choose, enjoying the anticipation. A lot of the newer shops stocked foreign flavors, as well. Stalker Girl's clan carefully selected foreign merchants for immigration. We could trust them. Still, information about their arrival would leak out eventually.

I reminded myself to improve the circulation of goods. Right now, things moved slowly due to the closed borders, and most of our imports came from smuggling. Maybe I should install a smuggling port in the pseudo-dungeon. That sounded profitable.

Miss Armor Rep looked into a clothing store, vacillated over accessories, and compared them with the products of the next store over. Looked fun! Took a while, though.

The general store still had far and away the best assortment, but Miss Armor Rep still pored over the items in all the different stores, intensively comparing them. She seemed to be enjoying herself. She could never have had this much fun trapped in the endless dark. Soon, she'd find the perfect thing and we could move on… At least, I hoped so? Please?

Meanwhile, Slimey boinged around gobbling up food from every stall—he was already spending my money! Slimey had incredible shopping abilities, but just as impressive were the food cart operators selling Slimey their dishes like he was a normal person! This town *was* popular with monsters after all. What was this place called, again?

Smiling shoppers, hardworking salespeople. Children ran through the streets, laughing and playing, and the elderly watched the busy street with smiling eyes. This was the city.

"I wanna eat something myself! Before Slimey spends all of my money!"

Jiggle jiggle!

Miss Armor Rep had already activated her greed-mode, and Slimey had unleashed his gluttonous fury! If I didn't hurry, we'd run out of money! *Better eat fast! This is supposed to be a treat for me, too!*

DAY 61

NOON

All I did was look at the effects and I got a nasty cringe in my heart.

THE WHITE LOSER INN

I WENT BACK to the inn to take a rest and look at the dungeon boss's drop item: "Nightmare Eyepatch. Resistance, Intelligence +50%. Spell Eye-strengthening (hyper). Sorcery. Hypnosis. Mesmerize. Puppetry. Memory Modification. Consciousness Control. Spirit Pollution." There was *nothing* good about this thing!

"It just casually throws in Mesmerize and Puppetry, plus Memory Modification and Consciousness Control—and the worst of all, Spirit Pollution? What the hell?! My sex appeal is doomed! And it looks so tacky!"

Jiggle jiggle.

Most terrifying thing of all…was its Spell Eye-strengthening effect! Anything but this. I shouldn't have looked! The design was a black jewel emblazoned on black cloth. Wearing this would be a sign of terminal *chuunibyou* disease. This was the climax of cringe; nothing could cramp my style any faster! This was no good, no good.

"Who can I pawn this off on? Ugh, but I'm the only one with Spell Eye in the first place. I don't want that to be common knowledge, though."

Jiggle jiggle.

I did already have Puppetry and Mesmerize; they were sealed. But I couldn't tell the others I had this, too. The girls had already been traumatized enough by the skills they knew about. This accessory was maximum tween cringe, straight out of *Tales of Earthsea.* This was my first time seeing a "hyper" effect, too. I had seen "ultra" before, so this was even *more* powerful. What was going to come next? "Mega", "ultimate", or "supreme"? *I just know there's gonna be more!*

“Normally, there’d be no point in using an item that blocked one of my eyes…but with Spell Eye, I could still see no problem.”

It was an item that intentionally blocked one eye for the purpose of strengthening Spell Eye. I had Jupiter Eye, so I could easily see through any piece of cloth. Not that I was looking before! Don’t tell the girls that I can see through blindfolds. It’ll get me chased after with a certain whip. Class Rep kind of lost it at me yesterday, too. She was so mad she almost awakened something dangerous inside of herself!

That made four items that had to be sealed away at all costs. Even owning them did unmistakable damage to my coolness.

“I mean, I’ve got the Temptation Shirt for inviting, the Prometheus Chains for binding, the Submission Choker for subjugating, and the Nightmare Eyepatch for mesmerizing, puppetry, and consciousness controlling—what kind of nasty little guy have I become?!”

Jiggle jiggle.

And with Servitude, I could have complete control over *anyone! This is a disaster; this is irreparable damage to my sex appeal!* I needed to seal this straightaway, or my luck with the ladies would vanish! Soar straight into another dimension! I buried the eyepatch immediately at the very bottom of my item bag. I couldn’t have the girls be terrified of what I might to do them. I needed to take measurements, after all, so my top priority was erasing this item’s very existence.

“Why do all of the nastiest items in the world somehow immediately find their way to me, a sweet innocent boy?!” I cried.

Jiggle jiggle.

This world was trying to kill my sex appeal after all! *I won’t let you. I won’t let you!!* That was my only shot at appealing to the opposite sex, and I was facing a dire shortage (and thus desperate longing)!

“Normally a Nightmare item would be perfect for one of the Arts Club girls, but this? This is just too much. Ooh, but they would look so good in gothic lolita dresses and eyepatches.”

Wiggle wiggle?

Slimey came back to my room after playing with Poster Girl and Stalker Girl, while Miss Armor Rep delighted over her brand-new hat. *Now, should I resume dungeon raiding, or go for lunch round two?* I doubted I could handle a second round of *that*, though. Uh oh, Miss Armor Rep just whipped out her morning star!

"You had that with you this whole time?" I exclaimed. "Because I was thinking about whipping you up a nice women's blazer to awaken and enrage and empower and unleash my inner teenage boy demon. How about it?"

Glaaaaaaaaaaare.

So, she thought the tartan checker miniskirt I just showed her was too short, after all? Well, I intentionally made it that way, it was *incredibly* short! It was only a matter of time before one of us went on a rampage!

The other girls still had their school uniforms from our old world. Obviously, they all matched. Miss Armor Rep always stared longingly at them whenever they wore them. She was incredibly happy back when I made her a matching tracksuit; it was still one of her most prized possessions. A personal treasure of hers.

So, I made her a school uniform, school slippers. I even tried making her a matching school backpack and school duffel. Only the duffel was a complete failure. I couldn't remember our school logo, 'kay? What was our school called again? But Miss Armor Rep seemed happy, and that was enough for me.

"Oh yeah, I heard that the nearby buildings are finally opening up?"

Jiggle jiggle?

Hm?

Right now, the girls all shared one room in The White Loser Inn. They might have wanted their own bedrooms, but there wasn't enough space—and thanks to the unprecedented economic boom, there weren't nearly enough inns in town to meet demand. The food at this inn was popular as well. It was a long-standing recommendation of the Adventurers' Guild. Remodeling was one option, but the land was too cramped, so I had two nearby houses emptied out for rebuilding. One of them was a shop

behind us, so they needed some time to prepare the rooms, but they finally moved out yesterday. *Are the buildings ready today?*

I had already talked to Poster Girl's mom and dad about it. They were super polite, but I'd be in serious trouble if I didn't pay up what I owed. Because Stalker Girl had definitely seen my spending spree out in the city, so they knew just how much money I had. *Better hurry!*

"Hey, Poster Girl," I called. "Done anything to earn a less generic name yet? Nameless Inn Girl, are our new buildings emptied out? What was that place called? I've never seen it open before, ever since its going-out-of-business sale; has it been doing going-out-of-business sales this whole time? Because it was closed the whole time it couldn't sell goods. Is it doing so well it can't sell to us yet?"

"Ah, Haruka-kun! I just finished moving them out. They wanted to thank you for finding them such a nice new place. And it wasn't a shop, it was a farm tool workshop. Their business involved going directly to farmers to sell to them. You showed them how to make new tools in a nearby village and they were incredibly happy. Don't you remember that?"

I did meet a farm-tool-toting old dude in some village some time, just kind of talked to him in a totally normal way and explained him how to build granaries and winnowers and other farm tools, as one does, you know. Like, about hoes and other various improvements. He was pretty excited about it and gave me some pocket change as thanks. I mean, he was an old dude. You honestly think I was gonna remember him?

"I thought it was just a random conversation. He owned the shop behind us this whole time?"

The last history class we had was on the Edo Period, so I happened to remember a lot, but the history of the world after that? Total mystery to me. Of course, the nerds knew everything. They couldn't make anything, though. *How the hell does a katana turn into a steamship?!*

"All right."

Jiggle jiggle?

I had restored plenty of magic power, and I finished up the plans well in advance. They covered both of the buildings, so I could get started now. I wanted to keep renting my current room, so I could just expand it without

changing anything around too much. I certainly couldn't send a dining hall full of micro-mini-skirted, fishnet-stocking-adorned, cheongsam-wearing, leg-flashing teenage girls out into the public. Although if I did, I'd probably get a lot of customers.

First, I set up the steel frame for a tall-ceilinged imperial hotel. This was the designated inn for a dungeon empress and a Slime emperor, so it'd better look like it. I had already finished the mechanism for a magic elevator, which I calculated could work easily for up to eight floors.

"I'll put a viewing platform and dining hall on the eighth floor, then the baths and training grounds in the basement. I'll make a mix of rooms and suites…and sweet rooms, to be safe."

Nod nod.

Jiggle jiggle.

Ooh, how about an imperial suite? Although, we were in a kingdom, not an empire, so when it came to imperial-style stuff it was reserved for monsters. We did have two of them, though? Both were emperor level?

"Hey, what the—whaaaaaat?!" shrieked Poster Girl.

Jiggle jiggle!

I just had to give it a name now. I went with the most well-known inn in all the realm—that's right, The White Loser Inn! The most legendary inn in the kingdom. Well, all the people who'd come from the same village as Poster Girl's family had been saying so, anyway. I didn't want to erase their history—the history of the hero who saved their lives. But apparently, they called him the White Loser because they didn't know his real name. *Would the hero in question really be happy with being memorialized that way?*

I took down the old back building and converted it into building materials. I poured magic power into the earth and into the building, let the magic seep deep into the ground, used Holding on it, and finally kneaded the steel poles firmly into place to build the frame.

After firmly mixing everything together and raising up the frame, I put the supporting beams in place to hold up the floors. I arranged the frame of each floor on the ground, and then raised it vertically and lowered each floor into place. I repeated the process, strengthening the beams along the

way, until I finished all eight floors. I ensured it was robust, sturdy, and long-lasting.

"Whew, I would've been in trouble if I didn't prepare all the arrangements in advance."

No matter how detailed your plans might be, actual construction always revealed errors. In this case, stopping at eight floors turned out to be the right move. I rooted everything in a deep stone foundation, but the center of gravity ended up being higher than expected. Maybe I went a bit overboard with the glass-façade eighth-floor observation deck and restaurant?

"I mean, it's not an observation deck if you can't see out of it. And I don't want any wind blowing in, right?"

"…"

Poster Girl was frozen? The local glass studio had barely gotten off the ground, so glass hadn't become commonplace around the city yet. It sold well, but it was damn heavy.

"I made the glass too thick," I grumbled. "But that'll protect against bullets. Not that there are any guns here."

Maybe it was because I installed glass windows into every room, but it really was more top-heavy than I'd wanted it to be.

"I'll strengthen the lower walls and cheat this into existence," I decided. "I need some soundproofing, too…yeah, that's a must!"

Then there was the basement. Poster Girl still hadn't said anything, so I supposed she was okay with it. I was pretty much done, but the first two floors had stone walls with windows. Kind of a weird look, but stylish enough, I guess? Not even an orc king could take down this impregnable inn!

The townspeople were starting to come by to see the newly completed imperial inn. Stalker Girl's clan all showed up at once, frozen in place with their mouths wide open. Poster Girl's family was in tears. Poster Girl, her mother, her father, weeping. Probably from the memories. Maybe they were haunted by what they could have protected if they had always

had these walls. With walls like these, the White Loser would have never needed to sacrifice himself.

After losing everything they owned and everyone they loved, they stood back up and built a new inn. They would never lose anything again. They could offer an eternal port to any runaway in a storm. That was how sturdy I built this inn to be. Because it could absolutely protect everyone, it would disgrace the name of the White Loser and everything he sacrificed.

With everything carefully built, I was ready to earn back the months' worth of rent that I owed. The bath I'd built on the property charged a fee, you see.

DAY 61

AFTERNOON

I could make a killing by installing some massage chairs at a tourist site.

THE WHITE LOSER INN

I WENT INSIDE the new The White Loser Inn and walked around, making tweaks as I went. The whole time, Poster Girl and her family kept thanking me. Their eyes full of tears, they exhausted all the vocabulary for gratitude in the world. Their scars sure ran deep.

The inn may have been renewed, but they would never forget their history. The home they'd made here, the city, the neighbors and friends they'd grown close to. The sadness and suffering they all endured—no one would ever forget that. It was engraved into their hearts. Those experiences taught them the fragility of life. Poster Girl's family had never felt secure once since fleeing their old home, not once.

But now, I present to you, the Fortress Inn! Impregnable, invincible, and impenetrable, residents of the new imperial White Loser Inn had no need for fear! It was a safe, secure, and stable inn. I hadn't told them yet that I'd made it to honor the two almighty emperors who dwelled here, plus a whole group of level 100+ S-rank adventurer-class high school students. But anyway! I didn't think you could get a safer place than here. Still, you know what they say: Once you lose everything once, you never feel secure again. This inn would not fall, though. I couldn't bring back what they had lost, but I could build an inn that would prevent them from losing anything ever again. I learned that from when I rebuilt the village. It was the best I could do.

"Thank you so much…truly…thank you…"

The new heroes and guardians of the domain had inherited those deeds of the many fallen heroes of the past. I couldn't carry on their legacy,

but I could do just a teensy little favor, just an itty bitty part-time deal for them. This inn would never fall.

But the interior was taking a lot longer than expected. I ended up getting ahead of myself and building furniture as I went. *It is called The White Loser Inn, so a white theme is kind of a must?* An imperial hotel also sounded white to me, but above all else, it demanded spaciousness and luxury. I needed to cheer up the interior, too, so I casually installed some Venus de Milo and Winged Victory of Samothrace sculptures in the lobby and hung a series of enormous sunflower paintings from the reception down the hallway to invoke a museum atmosphere. I got bad reviews on my Tutankhamun, so I took that one out. I guess it looked like a monster to people in this world? People from this world were pretty sensitive, too, so nude paintings and sculptures were a no-go. I had to put a shirt on the Venus de Milo. Bummer!

"Upgrading this inn with beautiful, gorgeous artistic artworks is pretty stimulating! It's starting to stimulate the sensitive desires of a sensual teenage boy! You feeling this?"

Glaaaaaaaaare.

I really put my all into the sculptures of Gian Lorenzo Bernini, but they were all pronounced out-of-bounds. *But it's art! I swear?* Antonio Corradini's "The Veiled Truth" *was* clothed, at least technically? Look, clothes! See-through clothes, but totally there. I spent all that time making sculptures and 70 percent of them were declared trash, so I just had to install the remaining modest works of art.

My imperial suite was good enough for the emperor's family for sure. This was a kingdom, so the only emperors around were the former dungeon empress and the former Slime emperor. The other goblin and kobold kings were boring, standard royalty in comparison. *I wonder if they'll stop by.*

"Hey, it's all done! What do you think?"

Jiggle jiggle!

I had never stayed in an imperial suite before, so I had no clue what they looked like. I mean, why would I have? I just kind of riffed off what I knew about fancy hotels. I had never even stepped foot in one, much less stayed overnight. No, not even in a love hotel. You don't go to those alone.

“Hmmm, it’s lacking a little *something*,” I said, “but I think I should leave that up to the owners, so if there’s anything you want, just let me know? Right now, it’s two separate buildings, but if you want I can connect them and unify this one to the original, so just ask. No special requests? Maybe some weapons?”

Poster Girl’s family stood there with their mouths gaping and shook their heads. So, they didn’t want anything? They were the ones who were going to manage it; they needed to be strict about what they wanted in their inn. But they had gone totally mute.

They just followed me around the inn, mouths frozen in silence whole time. Frozen in the lobby, frozen on the observation deck, frozen in the elevator and the baths. Just straight up speechless and frozen, following me around like ducklings. They were practically frozen solid by this point. How about some fantasy-world radio calisthenics to loosen up? Not that they’d have any idea how to do them.

Outside, a big crowd had gathered. It was a pretty impressive sight to them, an eight-story building with an observation deck, rarely-seen glass fitted in every single room. Poster Girl’s family started to explain enthusiastically to the crowd, at last. *This place could become a tourist site,* I thought. In that case, I could whip up a bunch of massage chairs! Time to make some money!

I was out of magic power, but I wasn’t in any rush to finish it off yet, so I swung by the armory…the workshop? The bald old dude’s place—oh god, what was wrong with him? He had a bloodcurdling bloodthirst in his eyes. *Furious, bald, and bearded!*

“Shut the hell up! Stop calling me bald and old, goddamn it!”

Sparks flew like mini-fireworks—he hammered the iron with all his might, again, and again. He took the apparently simple labor of striking and wielding the mallet with precision, elegance, perfectly judging the state of the metal, before hammering the sizzling metal once more. Anyone who believed that smithing was simple would never be able to smith in their life. This was a man striving for perfection, trying to craft objects on par with the gods. A man who lived for his work. To create something…on par with my bras. Well, hey, I had to take those seriously or I would’ve gotten in trouble!

I wasn't at the blacksmith's to make bras. I might need a wire for a certain set of specimens, but cloth did the job well enough for our present needs. Calculating that weight was a hell of a lot harder than building a bridge, I'll have you know! *That* bra was a true miracle of engineering!

"My bad, sorry for the wait. I've got the money ready, so sell me everything you got. Thanks to you, my business is flourishing. Now I've got enough iron for a lifetime, and people want my swords. Tell me what you want, and it's yours."

Uh, this old dude's tsundere attitude is kind freaking of me out. I didn't need *that* from a balding old dude! Well, maybe a chibi kinda gal. There was demand among the nerds for that kinda merch… I could take them for a lot of money if I could get my hands on some. But I got the impression that a blacksmith was the wrong place to commission a shortstack dwarf girl?

"I came to see what you need. Spellstones and spellstone powder and spellstone fluid, effects prepped, enchantments harnessed, effects, all available by request. You know you want 'em! I'm taking it straight to you, this stuff ain't going on the open market, you see… And you won't find anything like this from other merchants, get it?"

This blacksmith poured his heart and soul into his crafts. He couldn't bear to see anyone else die, which was why he worked so hard, why he struggled and toiled. I'd do anything for his sake. My heart bled for him, truly.

That is to say, I was flat broke.

"What do you want?" I asked. "I'll build it. You need more weapons, right? Of course, invincible weapons are impossible, everyone knows that, and I'll still make some for you. I'll do the impossible if that's what it takes for you to buy, so ask away!"

At the very least, I wanted the common soldiers to have poison- and status-ailment-resistant armor. Ideally, I'd add effects to resist everything and anything, but that wasn't possible. So I just needed to make them a little stronger, a little tougher. Give them the slightest chance that they would survive for a single moment longer. Life is precious, so buy from me, okay? Come on, old man, I need the money!

“All right, I’ll take ’em.”

I came to sell. And since he didn’t want the people of the frontier to die, he was game to buy from me. But I needed the money anyway! If he didn’t want anything, I’d make him take it!

So I made a fortune at the armory and headed for the general store… and realized that the lady would probably put in additional orders. Uh oh. Huh? Was that Sexy Maid Girl? But she didn’t have her sexy dress on anymore, just regular clothes.

“You’re a maid, for god’s sake! Where the hell is your maid outfit? Don’t you have any maid-ish pride?” I shouted.

To be fair, while she was technically a maid, she was in a difficult position right now. She was wearing normal clothes out of an abundance of caution.

“If you’re gonna go out, at least wear defensive equipment,” I said. “That sexy dress could easily nullify an attack from a dungeon monster! Besides, it’s hot!”

“Wh-what are you doing here?” she yelled at me.

“That’s why I made an emergency order top-class maid outfit. It was for you!”

“I don’t want it!”

“Endowed with a complete set of battle effects, including total resistances, super-speed, and body-strengthening power-ups, plus a 20% boost to all stats and defense. Be blown away by this close-combat maid outfit! Also, it’s hot? It’s got plenty of defense, but if I’d made it plain, it’d be no fun. Y’know?”

“Are you listening to me?!”

I also installed containers for hidden weapons and endowed it with Storage, too. Maid Girl was strong, so I specialized her equipment for assassin work. Also, and this was important: I made sure it was super revealing.

“It goes without saying, but I installed Storage in the miniskirt so you can store weapons there. Obviously, I put the Wrathful Zweihänder in there

for you in the pouch below the miniskirt, too, so you can go to town with a two-meter-long greatsword whenever you want!"

"Are you going to listen a word that I'm saying?!"

The greatsword was perfect for Maid Girl, but it'd be a steep price to pay if I got attacked by a sexy assassin maid with a two-meter greatsword! I guess I'd get paid in the sight of bare shoulders, stomach, and thighs, though, so consider the debt settled!

"No, not for free, so don't flee—there's a lot to see, especially around that slit that reveals the navel! Now *that* assassinates me—an ass, I guess. Plus, the bare-backed apron dress portion grants Perfect Invincibility via magic power, and obviously the outfit comes with knee socks and frills, and it bares the shoulders but comes with long gloves too. It's just so amazing!"

Getting attacked by a maid like this would make me a hero to the guys in town!

"First, I owe you my life, and now you are bestowing such a valuable item upon me…but it's way too gross for me to feel grateful. Just tell me already, what's your secret?"

"Huh? Love, of course!"

"But clothes shouldn't expose as much bare skin as this. Normally, I wouldn't mind showing my wrists or ankles, but covering them up here makes showing everything else seem dirtier! This is not a functional maid outfit! I knew I shouldn't have put this thing on—and stop staring at me! No one would ever hire a maid in a disgusting outfit like this, much less a princess. Not with a dress like this! I have no words! The impudence! You'll pay for this! I'll bring you to justice!"

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Yeah, her tantrum made her thighs shake magnificently. And how her chest bounced! What a marvelous dress!

"Don't tell me the princess is picky? Is she shopping for another outfit? The nobles' army is after her life! If she heads out now, they'll definitely target her—she could be pulled into all sorts of traps. Plus Mr. Meridad won't let her out in the first place. We need to stop the war first.

That's kind of a big step to skip. Don't tell me you're planning on trying to stop it, just the two of you? That's impossible! Are you stupid?"

Maid Girl was flying around town making preparations to get ready to fight. Weapons, medicine, items.

"If the princess so commands it, I shall follow her to the very edge of her universe, guarding her until the end. To that end, I shall accept your equipment, no matter how perverted it may be. Even if its depravity subjects me to the height of ridicule…I shall be my lady's sword and shield. Thank you."

With her head bowed, she ran off. *Damn, I like watching her go!* So, she hadn't given up yet? Those two wanted to stop the war by themselves. They'd risk their lives doing it. They didn't stand a chance trying to carry the weight of both the kingdom and the duchy on their shoulders, the two of them alone. She was one suicidal maniac of a princess, as it turned out. A stubborn, stupid princess through and through.

DAY 61

EVENING

Nirsauna sounds great, but Sparadise is also an option.

INTERLUDE: THE WHITE LOSER INN

AFTER WE MADE IT to the 50th floor of the dungeon and beat the dungeon boss, we were excited to get back to the inn…only to find that it wasn't there? Well, it was there, but…as a five-star hotel. It was a pure white, eight-story building on top of a modern stone foundation, with clear, jewel-like, never-before-seen-in-this-world glass windows, bottom to top.

The sign said, "The White Loser Inn." Well, we all knew who was behind this. We went inside to discover a stunning work of architectural beauty…and there was the culprit, as nonchalant and unrepenting as it was possible to be. The inn's owners beside him had tears brimming in their eyes.

"Welcome back! So, the main building's over there, y'all are over here. Not much has changed, really. I added some new rooms and made it bigger, but you still gotta pay rent. Makes sense, right?"

The same entrance, the same dining hall. Everyone was exchanging greetings as they entered. Same old routine. Now the inn had gotten just a *teensy* bit fancier, but we still had each other. He left this part of the inn untouched; it was the place that we all came home to.

But I took a closer look and noticed he made quite a few changes. He expanded the space and raised the ceiling a bit. It didn't feel new by any means because he'd kept all the same materials. It still felt like home. It must've been incredibly difficult to expand the room but keep all the same materials and familiar design in place.

"It's bigger…right?"

"It feels the same, but it's totally different!"

"Still feels like home."

Now there were lots of new rooms, so everyone talked over whether they wanted a private room or to share with a roommate. *I'd like to have some time to myself…but no, I think I'd get lonely.* He also expanded the girls' bath and added a magic-powered shower and sauna. He even added a basement training ground. So, he got rid of the old back garden, huh? That was a room now.

The White Loser Inn's owners were practically weeping. He built them an inn that was so beautiful, so strong. I knew just how they felt. To have gotten something so wonderful, so sturdy, unshakeable, after losing everything they had. Now they had safety in the truest sense of the word.

Even if the whole city was destroyed in a monster stampede, this inn would remain standing. People could evacuate here and survive. It would never be lost. That was what this new design symbolized. *That's what he made for them…* Well, you couldn't really call it an inn anymore, but whatever it was, it was here. Everyone would be okay. It would protect all of us.

"Even if the city walls fell, the fortress fell, the castle…this inn would *still* be impregnable. That oughta surprise the monsters, right?"

"And the managers!"

It was unbelievably sturdy and stout. Strong. Additional adjectives applied, like gorgeous and luxurious. And it was stuffed with so much artwork that you could mistake it for some kind of Louvre, or perhaps a souped-up Metropolitan. *Yeah, this place is sure to be a profit machine…* Even though all the art was fake, it had an authentic aura about it!

"Did Van Gogh paint that many sunflowers?"

"Wasn't Venus de Milo a little different?"

"They were small paintings, but he did a sunflower series. Looks like he put clothes on Venus," commented Book Club President.

"Just how many Mona Lisas did he make?"

"He stopped at the impressionists, though."

"Too hard for him?"

"He put Warhols in his bedroom…"

“I think nudity is taboo in the culture here.”

“Ohh, no wonder Venus is all dressed up!”

Passersby from the city stared in awe at the artwork. The culture in the city was forcibly evolving from all this exposure to culture. This wasn’t just an industrial and cultural revolution. For the people of the city, this art induced a longing for beauty in daily life. This town was going to become a beautiful place. Seeing happiness and beauty take root here filled me with a sense of awe.

First, Haruka-kun had built a church-style orphanage, and now, a hotel-museum. The people in this town, who had focused on sturdy and livable houses, were now painting their walls white, arranging their rooms, building gardens. The city was evolving bit by bit.

“So *that’s* it,” exclaimed Vice Rep A. “I wondered why this city felt so dreary. It’s because they didn’t have any art or culture!”

“But now there’s fashion and furniture, and now that *this* exists… It’s just that Omui was so poor before, right?”

“Just as poor as the person who built this palace?”

“He’s still paying his fees on a tab, isn’t he?!”

He prepared dinner for us: nikujaga, meat and potato stew—traditional Japanese soul food. I cried. All of the girls did. He made Japanese-style white rice and fried fish and pickled cucumber. *All incredibly rare in this world…* Everything tasted so good. Happiness swelled up in me from the bottom of my heart.

“The taste was spot on!”

“He made the rice in a few minutes! How did he do it?”

“Rice made that quickly has no right to taste this good!”

“And you can’t pickle cucumber instantly, right?”

He could automate both the taste of food and the cooking process with magic, apparently.

“Sooo…how come he fries the fish by hand? Just the fish?”

“Well, he still uses Fire magic for that.”

“For a guy who always complains about his bad skills, he’s sure making the most of them.”

Production-type skills shouldn’t be able to achieve *this* much. He talked about disassembling and reaggregating his skills. Nobody else could even begin to understand what he meant by that.

“Those piping hot potatoes were priceless, perfectly seasoned, spiced, sliced, *and* served.”

“He mentioned wanting konjac too, right?”

“We’re eating better than we did back in Japan. Just how far is he going to go?”

Then, we moved on to the baths.

“It’s like a resort in here!”

“The hot water sprays out of the sculptures!”

“Oh my *Gooood*, marble bathtubs!”

“And cypress bathtubs, too!”

“Check out the cold bath!”

“Look, there’s a waterfall!”

“Waterfall baths! Who knew it was this easy to achieve Nirsauna?!”

“Uh…you mean Nirvana?”

“Oh! Sure!”

The baths were huge; apparently, the girls’ bath was the biggest. Haruka-kun built a separate bath for the guys. Typical Haruka-kun.

“Wow, and showers, too.”

“And jacuzzis! It’s like what he made back in the cave. But upgraded!”

Why was Haruka-kun so obsessed with baths? He made a clawfoot bathtub with jacuzzi jets within a single week of coming here. Why did he get to enjoy a bachelor pad like that? So unfair!

“Time to unwind in the sauna!”

“Ahhhh.”

Jiggle jiggle!

Everyone accepted the danger of a second serving of nikujaga over rice and indulged regardless. All twenty of us wrapped ourselves in towels and strolled into the sauna. Plus one, of course. All of us were pleasantly stuffed.

"Dang, it's hot in here."

"Shed sweat! Shed fat!"

"Perish and burn in hell!"

Vibing, chilling, relaxing all cool (hot)…it was paradise! Boiling hot paradise. In our pre-bath training session, Shield Girl (now known as Shield Rep) had gone all out. Even Angelica-san was impressed with her growth; Shield Rep fought with the fervent desire to protect us all, displaying remarkable determination. She deserved her new title.

Before, you could tell from her eyes that she lacked confidence. But she'd changed. "Haruka-kun gave me this shield. I'm Shield Rep, now. I'll live up to it!" she said. And she did.

Shimazaki-san got some insane new equipment of her own, giving her a new level of speed—and therefore overwhelming power. She was the queen of ice now, with the Eternal Ice Spear in one hand, the Ice Great Shield in the other, and all clad in ice armor. Cold and beautiful. She displayed unmatched prowess in battle, stern and severe, mowing down her enemies. But as soon as the battle ended, she let the ice thaw and went back to her flirtatious, playful self.

Book Club President was determined to keep it a secret, but the Arts Club girls had a new attack plan that made use of status ailments. They could easily weaken the monsters, allowing us to cut right through them in battle.

I saw Haruka-kun give Book Club President the Ripple Necklace after a long discussion, but there had to be something else in store… Equipment for Kakizaki-kun and the sports squad, maybe? So long as Haruka-kun wasn't around, they threw their boomerangs properly and everything, keeping the monsters in check with their halberds and then mowing down monsters with swords. I assumed Haruka-kun had something

else up his sleeve for them. For some reason they just got stupid whenever Haruka-kun joined in.

Then there was the indomitable combo of Haga-san and Shisui-san, known to Haruka-kun as Volleyball Girl A and B, who were currently stewing in silence. Chances were that they were nervous about the terrifying prospect of getting measured for their bras and shorts, since it was their turn. I wanted to accompany them, but that also seemed inappropriate. I'd be lying if I told them "it'll be fine." By the end I'd been too broken to even stand. Just remembering it made my body start to burn…

"We need a medic! Class Rep collapsed in the sauna!"

"Why is her face so red?!"

"She's incoherently murmuring…sexual things?"

"Someone, pick her up, carry her out of here!"

"She needs to cool down… No, using Blizzard is overboard!"

"Now she's frozen!"

That measuring session was a danger to maidens. A maiden besmircher, a maiden- and soul-breaker. Whatever went on in that measuring session, there was no way you could come out from it the same!

DAY 61

NIGHT

A multi-directional offensive and defensive maneuver results in multi-directional shaking.

THE WHITE LOSER INN

I HAD TO DO Volleyball Girls A and B tonight. Seemed like they were prioritizing the girls with the biggest chests—the ones who needed bras the most. Yeah, they were definitely big enough to belong in the top tier. *I can still see it clearly in my mind's eye…the magnificent jiggling from their jumps…*

So, the ex-Volleyball Girls—or, I guess just plain Volleyball Girls, seeing how that's what I called them—there they were. They attacked together from both directions, left and right, up and down. An unstoppable team. And unstoppable shaking. So much shaking you'd think they carried around two volleyballs on their chests. *Only natural to prioritize those.*

They stared nervously at me.

The importance of bras went beyond a single teenage boy's understanding, imagination, and fantasies. The resistance generated by the movement of one's body contributed to fatigue, which, in battle, put the girls' lives at stake. But frills were important too, y'know? Still, seeing these two usually boisterous girls go so quiet, when most of the time they were totally indifferent to who saw them in their undies…they were making me nervous too! I had been prepared for them to start stripping down cheerfully, like two more members of Nudist Girl's clan! *This is so awkward!*

The fact that they were here meant their braless state was getting in the way of their fighting. Nothing to be embarrassed about. I should just get to work like everything was totally normal and make their bras! Yep, this was just another kind of armor crafting. *Except it was bras.*

They were wearing short dresses because they'd be easy to take off. They were having trouble undoing the buttons because their fingers were trembling…*C'mon, seriously?* There was nothing normal about this. Instead, their attitudes were awakening my most aberrant, abrasive teen desires!

One of them started unbuttoning from the top, the other from the bottom…the sound of rustling clothes boomed in my ears. Miss Armor Rep had already put her hands over my eyes so I couldn't see, but the sounds were making me visualize *everything!* Normal had turned into hormonal very fast! *Pop, snap…* It was too vivid!

"Okay, er, so it's kind of *too* quiet right now. I'm just gonna measure and make and adjust and correct, that's all, okay? And I can't see you either, and I'm not going to touch you, so just relax and start shouting and cackling like normal, okay? Please? This isn't very Twin Telephone Poles of you! C'mon!"

"We're not the Twin Telephone Poles!"

"Cackling? What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

They hadn't relaxed yet, so I decided to keep talking to them as I began the process. The atmosphere was bound to get awk fast otherwise. I began the 3D analysis with Area Analyze, and through that process I noticed whatever I noticed. Nothing to be done about that! *Just keep chatting…about the dungeon today, about dinner requests, clothes they wanted. Just everyday small talk…just keep it light. That's it.*

"So, Shield Girl, I mean Shield Rep, let me borrow her Counter Shield…ugh, uff…"

"Yeah, I swapped the Braid Shield with her, adjusted the weight, and then charged in…ahh!"

Talking made things a lot less awkward, but our conversation was frequently interrupted by "agh" and "ugh." Could we stop with that, please? Unless this was practice for battle or something?

"I don't mind it that much, that we can't play anymore," Volleyball Girl A said. "Although there are things I miss, like nationals, obviously."

"Yeah, I mean, we did win second place!"

"But…it's fun fighting with everyone here, too. I like going all out on the battlefield, screaming and—*aaaaaugh*—everything, it's not so bad."

"Yeah, I like the—*uuuumf*—too, it's fun."

"Y'know, maybe we should forget all about volleyball while we're here. Although getting second place instead of first is always gonna piss me off!"

Shouldn't they have joined a championship team in high school, then? Girls were stronger mentally and more adaptable than guys for the most part. The two of them were half-bragging, half-resigned, half-enjoying themselves, and half-avoiding thinking about it. If we ever made it to the beach, I'd set up a beach volleyball tournament for them. I bet they'd enjoy that.

It was seriously such a waste that all of their training and hard-earned excellence had become useless. There was no way they weren't upset about it. I bet beach volleyball could get popular here. *Of course, this supposition has nothing to do with the uniforms involved in beach volleyball, although a serious benefit of beach volleyball getting popular would be those uniforms getting popular…a serious, serious benefit. You know?*

Class Rep was a part of the tennis team, but I didn't feel like we needed to bring tennis here; tennis outfits weren't all that special. Tiny Animal did track and field, but she was still running around in this world, too. I could let her be. Popularizing rhythmic gymnastics seemed hardest. You needed equipment, and the techniques themselves were difficult, so you couldn't easily train up a rhythmic gymnast. But they had *leotards.* Miss Armor Rep owned about ten of those at this point. And she wore them *well.*

As we talked about this and that, my Magic Hands took care of the measurements and fed the data to Supreme Thinking. Cascading jiggles and ripples reverberated inside my brain… *No, Supreme Thinking, no need to feed me translations. Those jiggles aren't coming from Slimey! Plus, if I started replying to you aloud, they'd call a hotline on me.*

"Ugh, ugggh."

"Eep! Urr…urk!"

A wireless bra had plenty of elasticity, so it wouldn't compress and squeeze too tightly. I focused my efforts on securing balanced weight distribution. I also had to figure out how to prevent the straps from chafing in case of extreme movement. *I hate how used to bra-making I've become,* I thought. Not that I hated what I was doing in any way, but what kind of teenage boy runs a custom bra business? *I'm pretty sure my sex appeal never existed in the first place…* (Sad eyes. Covered by Miss Armor Rep's hands, of course.)

Everything was advancing smoothly, but I was pretty shook by the time I started working on the bottoms. I had a method for supporting and shaping butts, but in their cases, the musculature provided an additional challenge. I was shook because that meant another round of measurements and examinations with Magic Hands, a firm grasp with Holding, and a series of firm shakes. The shaking tired me out physically and shook me to my mental core! The sound alone was perilous!

Finally, at long last I comprehended their musculature and whipped together a volleyball uniform that made their bodies feel as light as air. They broke down in tears. They wanted to put them on right away. I decided to make them gym shorts next time. And I'd make a pair for Miss Armor Rep too, duh! I made a copy of everything for her. I had no regrets about that, no way, but to do what I did at night to someone in an outfit that made girls break down in tears of joy…something about that felt very wrong.

The hardest part was over. Well, I also had to pick up their discarded, freshly worn underwear. But the production was complete. And as for the underwear…they were still warm. Problematic!

There was something else I wanted to try out. I finally appraised today's prize, the Wrathful Zweihänder, and figured out what all of its materials were. Iron, mithril, and niello. Niello was one of the mystery metals that became popular as an ornament at the mining town. The locals clamored for it when I tried using Alchemy to craft more. I decided to produce more niello and force it on the meatheads.

"Because they're so stupidly stupid. Super stupid. So stupid that their stupidity knows no bounds. Stupid…and strong?"

Nod nod.

They had joined the duke's legion, so the army would never crumble. Even setting aside how they worked as a team, each one of them were geniuses of raw, instinctual, meatheaded battle prowess. Any time danger approached, their animal instincts would kick in and save the day. Some super stupid powers, indeed. Thanks to them, the duke's army was unbeatable. It ramped up the offense and defense of the entire outfit. I just didn't want to make them anything else—they'd probably start throwing it. They threw halberds and swung boomerangs, after all! Still, they were strong, each of them top-class fighters.

I wanted to make replicas. First came an examination with Magic Hands, a parsing with Holding, then an analysis with Supreme Thinking. I was just making a sword, so it wasn't much fun, but I still had to gather as much information as I could. I had all the necessary materials to create imitation Zweihänders, so now I just had to analyze, execute, use Alchemy, and replicate! The replicas might lose some of the originals' skills, but adding more mithril should bring them up to par. The problem was, even if I succeeded, the results would be more than two meters long each—insanely heavy and specialized. Which meant that the meatheads had to be the ones to swing 'em.

Once I mastered making replicas, I could easily solve our equipment shortage. I had to at least try it out, y'know? I focused my entire consciousness on the sword. *That's right, avoid looking at the underwear at all costs!*

Materials to components, metals to composition. Discover, uncover, analyze, comprehend. Unwind the constructed product to its roots…unfold the process of its creation. Who the hell could use something this big and heavy? You'd need the perfect combination of sheer strength, body control, and twitch-reaction muscles to wield this. Only a wild animal could grasp the method for taking advantage of its immense weight and swinging power. The weapons debuffed their users' INT, but these guys were meatheads to begin with. They probably wouldn't notice.

"It's perfectly suited to them," I said. "Maybe I'll confiscate those boomerangs. They aren't throwing them anyhow."

Wiggle wiggle.

Five Wrathful Zweihänders lay before my eyes. I couldn't tell which was the original, even when I lined them up next to one another. They all said the same thing: "Wrathful Zweihänder: Power +60%. Rampage. +ATT. –Intelligence." I'd done it! Next, I'd add mithril… There we go, a perfect replica, complete! Now for the rest. A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Rome wasn't built in a day. Nor was a burgeoning underwear company…but maybe we shouldn't talk about that.

DAY 62

MORNING

You went to buy a manju from the souvenir shop and came back fully armed?!

INTERLUDE: THE WHITE LOSER INN

AN EMERGENCY REPORT came in: Royal Girl and Maid Girl had left for the capital. They disappeared from the duke's palace in the middle of the night. Royal Girl left a note behind that read: "Thank you for everything. As a member of the royal family, I swear on my life that I will protect the frontier. Signed, Shalliceres du Diorelle." Nothing else. That was it. They went by themselves to stop the war.

The duke summoned the army immediately and dispatched a search team on horseback, then deployed forces to Murimuri Castle and the entrance of the pseudo-dungeon. Everyone was distraught, caught up in a total rushed panic to get the princess back.

"He left?"

"He left."

"We thought he would."

"Yeah, I figured."

Were we worried?

"It's a real shame."

"A pity, even."

"Definitely a tragedy."

"At least it's not a comedy?"

"That'd be more alarming!"

Just how many times had he scared us like this before? When we woke up in the morning, he was gone, the self-declared weakest, enslaver of the almighty Dungeon Emperor and unbeatable dungeon boss. Off to

protect the princess. The person least suited to protecting others out of everyone else in this world had joined the line to protect another. Although honestly, the three of them together were perhaps the most indomitable force in the universe… *A tragedy will definitely befall anyone foolish enough to take them on.*

Regardless, the entire class equipped themselves. Kakizaki-kun's group were testing out their new, massive swords. Poster Girl had passed the swords on to them from Haruka-kun.

Haruka-kun reportedly told her to "pass these off to the stupidest-looking five in the group," and she easily located Kakizaki-kun and the others. Poster Girl probably thought they were literally all named 'stupid', at this rate.

She also passed off a bag to the volleyball duo, but with the label "Raw," we all knew what was inside there. He even finished off his side-job before leaving to save the princess, huh?

And unlike Royal Girl's note, which clearly expressed her resolve and death wish, his didn't make any sense. "Gonna make some stacks at the souvenir shop! Major stacks! Infinite stacks! Right on!" He had a clearly-expressed wish for cash, but the note still didn't make the slightest bit of sense. But that was the only clue we had.

We *did* know that it wasn't a suicide note. More like a murder note. An admission of guilt, essentially.

"Well, guess we'd better go find out what they're up to," the girls sighed.

"Yeah, I guess so…"

And so we would. Two girls had left by themselves with the intention of sacrificing themselves to end the war. We *had* to go after them. That was where Haruka-kun went. There was plenty more to be said, but did it really need to be? We couldn't stop any of them, so we had to join them. We trained ourselves up to level 100 for this. We acquired such powerful equipment for times like these!

I could assume that they made their way for the pseudo-dungeon. They'd need to pass through it to get to their destination, and the princess probably couldn't make it through on her own. As for proof of their

destination, we found this in Haruka-kun's room: "Frontier specialty. Dungeon manju. You feel?" And there it was, manju wrapped in neat packages. *Delicious! Aha, he figured out how to make red bean paste!*

He left just enough for all of us, along with mugs of tea and hot water at the ready. Preparing all that must've delayed his departure, but his note seemed as nonchalant as ever. Maybe we were overreacting?

Haruka-kun had the other two with him, meaning there was no need for the rest of us to hurry. "We just need to get there before the war breaks out," the girls said. "The only risk to Haruka-kun is man-to-man combat. He's over-specialized for dungeons." So, we put on our equipment, went to leave the inn…and found a huge pot of oyakodon waiting for us in the dining hall, with a side of mushrooms. He made us breakfast before leaving. *Well, okay. Let's have a bite.*

With breakfast in our bellies, it was *finally* time to leave. We headed for the pseudo-dungeon. A group of eight of us with Super-speed went ahead, with the remaining twenty-one following. With high-speed movement skills at level 100, it would take us about an hour at full speed. It was dangerous to move at that speed without caution, however. If you went too fast, Presence Sensing and Enemy Tracking wouldn't keep up, and you could run into enemies before you even spotted them. We needed to match our pace to the pace of Presence Sensing and Enemy Tracking.

We approached the pseudo-dungeon.

"Don't sense anything…"

"Maybe they already went inside."

"Well, they *are* fast."

If Royal Girl and Maid Girl had left at some point during the night, then they would already be midway through the pseudo-dungeon by now, especially considering their high level.

"Slow down," I commanded. "Everyone, halt and stay alert!"

"Yes, ma'am!"

It was an army. Probably the Duke's, but we needed to be careful. We slowed down, hid our presences, and slowly got closer. I saw "OMUI" emblazoned on the carriages, so they were on our side. Why was it written

in such big, bold letters, though? That wouldn't make Haruka-kun any more likely to remember… If that did the job, then we'd all be wearing placards by now. *Not that we'd agree to it.*

One knight on horseback raised his arm as he galloped up towards us. *Oh, it's the duke.* And then behind him, his retainer, struggling to keep up.

"Lord Omui," I said, "I apologize for not keeping them in check. To be honest…"

When I explained the situation to Duke Omui, he burst out laughing. He already knew what was happening.

"No, not at all. I apologize for involving you in our quarrels once again. I sent out scouts to confirm the safety of the princess as quickly as possible…but you say Haruka-kun is after her, along with those monsters of his? Then, we have no need to worry about the princess! However…I cannot stand to place any more responsibility upon his shoulders. I shall not be further in his debt! I must hurry. I've already informed the army, so please wait at Murimuri Castle. Sorry, but I must take my leave!"

He immediately galloped away, with his retainer apologizing before chasing after him. I felt kind of bad for him.

"So, they're already gone. What do we do?"

"Should we head past the army and check things out for ourselves?"

"Why don't we wait for the rest of the class first and reconvene with them?"

"Yeah, let's do that."

The main force of the kingdom's army hadn't arrived yet. At their pace, they probably wouldn't get here for another week. Did they intend to draw the enemy into the desolate wasteland around Murimuri Castle? Or defeat the enemy at the pseudo-dungeon? Charging right into the enemy could result in casualties. Did he intend to open up a souvenir shop or something? And if so, how much would the manju cost, and would there be a limit per customer? *Because they were delicious!*

We met up with the rest of our class, proceeded to Murimuri Castle, and started preparations for an advance squad to make our way to the entrance of the pseudo-dungeon.

“As for prep…the ID card should be enough, right?”

“That’s all you need.”

Poster Girl had handed out ID cards that would permit us passage through the pseudo-dungeon unharmed. Displaying the ID card would activate the Master Golem and clear the way. *I guess a VIP pass isn’t enough proof?* We split into our divisions, finished preparations, and went into the pseudo-dungeon. We walked through without a problem, keeping our Enemy Tracking and Presence Sensing on guard for any kingdom adventurers or soldiers. There were a lot of new paths and traps. It seemed like Haruka-kun came back occasionally to add new features.

“Should we take the slide down to the exit?”

“That *can’t* be the right way.”

“Look, it goes straight past everything.”

“The long route is so annoying…”

Near the frontier-side exit, there was a big slide with a sign labeled “Return to Entrance,” so you could head to the kingdom-side entrance directly. But it would bypass the whole dungeon, and we couldn’t afford to miss anyone along the way. Supposedly, Slimey was a big fan of the slide. Some of the girls had taken it without realizing…it was a trap!

“Let’s keep our guard up and not activate any of the traps. Don’t slip on the oil.”

“Because if you fall to the bottom, your clothes are, like, history!”

“Ew, no thanks!”

“Boys, no peeking!”

In addition to the magic-activated traps, there were regular mechanical traps that were plain nasty, including the one that melted your equipment…and your clothes. It would take some serious courage for all the kingdom soldiers to fight their way through this dungeon. They’d be *way* better off tackling a normal one. Those dungeon bosses were way more straightforward than Haruka-kun. Their dungeon homes were so much simpler and friendlier than the nasty, vile, vicious, slimy, sneaky, cheat-stuffing mind that made *this* place.

“Do you think they already made it to Nallogi?”

“Well, Haruka-kun and the other two could make it that far already, but the princess? I don’t know…”

“They already out, don’t you think?”

The dungeon was equipped with a mechanism that disturbed Presence Sensing, so we couldn’t tell if they were out or not. We didn’t want to risk taking the slide and ending up in the clothes-melting pot, though. Our high-level equipment ought to resist melting, but it was way too valuable to take the risk. Everything had such high resistances that it *should* be okay, but…as maidens, we wanted to avoid the epic tragedy of clothes-melting at all costs. *Let’s just approach this dungeon with a little caution.*

“It’s so realistic!”

“Yeah, I’d probably attack that.”

“It’s even 3D.”

We were commenting on Haruka-kun’s giant spider painting on the dungeon ceiling. When you attacked it, the ceiling collapsed. One hasty attack, and you were screwed. These traps messed with your mind before they destroyed your body. Seriously nasty.

Since only a few frontier soldiers went ahead of us, they might attract the kingdom’s attention. If we didn’t hurry, the battle might already be underway. But rushing had consequences. It explained why Haruka-kun had already finished up all his affairs back in town. The renovations to the inn, the large stockpiles for the armory and the general store, new factories and warehouses everywhere, and the ultimate fortress to forever protect the people of Omui. He had done all he could for the frontier.

So, we had to find him. Just how far would he go? He probably didn’t know that himself, so we needed to follow him. Haruka-kun had no idea what the kingdom was doing. He didn’t anticipate anything—he just charged straight into war.

Predictions of our chances on the battlefield meant nothing to us. Our mission was to protect Haruka-kun. Maybe he would be fine without us, but if the time ever came when he needed us, and we weren’t there… Even if

we couldn’t catch up with him, we had to do whatever we could to be by his side. We had been striving for that all this time, and the day had finally arrived. We had to hurry.

DAY 62

MORNING

How can you sell manju if you act scared of 'em?

NALLOGI

WE ROAMED AROUND the ruins of the neighboring domain, me and Royal Girl, just the two of us. There were soldiers watching all around us, but we pretended we didn't see them and advanced. It was kind of like a date, except for the fact that Maid Girl was lying in wait in the shadows, and Slimey had shrunk himself down in a little ball hidden in my hood, so really there were four of us. Miss Armor Rep was off delivering a message.

"Tsk! I'm finally on something resembling a date with another girl, but every time I cozy up to her, a sword pokes out of the shadows. That's no fun! Although I must say, I appreciate that you're wearing the sexy dress at last."

"Shut your insolent trap!"

Jiggle jiggle!

Well, she had the dress on under her armor, so there was no exposure today…discounting the fact that I designed the armor to match the dress. It had a long section cut out on the back and the midriff. A brilliant design! Yes, all of the villains lying in wait were witnessing a display of pure sexiness! But now she was hiding her body behind her shield. Now, that was no fun! Nobody could see anything!

"Are you sure you want to come with me?" Royal Girl asked. "There are only enemies ahead, and while we might be able to spare my life, there is certainly no guarantee. Why would you put yourself into such a dangerous position?"

"Well, I was just kinda passing by on my way to make some big bucks, which I need to spend on something. Get it? So, I was just, you know, casually strolling through and spotted the sexy dress. Y'know, right? That was when I popped over to get a look. Like this?"

According to Stalker Girl, the main thrust of the kingdom's army was still a ways off, but the neighboring nobles had gathered a small army around this area. And while they were technically cooperating as a militia, there were ordinary bandits and brigands mixed in with the lot. I couldn't just let a princess walk around here by herself. There was the first prince Whatever-He-Was-Called in the kingdom's main force! And What's-His-Guts of Whatever-Military-Rank's army too!

Yeah…what was that guy called, again?

All right, I was listening, it was the prince. And based on typical norms in normal society and whatnot, a prince was male. Pretty old for a prince, though. And because all that happened in some place I didn't care about, I just ignored the backstory. But because I ignored the backstory, I didn't know what was going on. He was her brother, though. Seemed like killing her would be kinda rude.

"Assassins are 100 percent coming," Royal Girl said. "Regardless of their strength, they will be skilled at taking lives. I know that you have the might to defeat monsters and even dungeon bosses, but that will not help you against those specialized in human murder. They have been raised by the ancient nobles of this land to master the arts of assassination. This won't be a straightforward fight."

The merchants who were helping smuggle goods into the frontier had already been attacked several times. At first, I assumed that the kingdom knew we were smuggling, but it turned out it was just some villainous mercenaries and minor lords. They could be as villainous as they wanted on their own time, but I couldn't have them messing with our healthy smuggling operation. Any rice shortage would have direct effects on my dining table! Rice is worth a blood feud! Like, I'd kill seven people for harming one grain of rice. No, seven *gods*. That would be worth the lives of what, three hundred bandits? Yeah. *Sounds like a fair ratio to me.*

"Oh, I'm *soooo* scared of sexy female assassins! I'm trembling, (I'm clutching my stick soooo tight!) Just in case nobody heard: I reaaaaaaaally wouldn't want to get attacked by a sexy female assassin right now? (Okay, now sing this next part.) Pretty pretty *pleeeease* don't appear and attack me? (Tra la la la?)"

Now *that* was guaranteed to raise an event flag for some sexy female assassins. I bet a whole group of them were coming any second! Then the true test of my teenaged male mettle could commence. Would they be sexy ninjas? Or sexy assassins? I could go for a honey trap right now. Lather me up in dripping sticky wetness, pretty please. The question was, how many times would I have to make my appeal before they arrived? Two thousand? Finding honey traps was actually my top priority at this point. I ought to make a picket sign and demand it.

"Why are you singing at the top of your lungs in the middle of a stealth mission?" Maid Girl hissed. "We're trying to stay hidden here!"

"Can't you be quiet? Don't sing all casually like that!" said Royal Girl. "We're approaching assassins. Danger! Real deadly danger! And you're not even remotely scared? Please, don't tell me—your weakness is *honey traps…?* This is a dangerous mission, Haruka-sama! And there's no reason for you to risk your life. This burden should be borne by us kingdom royals alone!"

Huh? What was the issue? People just didn't understand the allure of sweet honey traps. Or sweet manju, either. Which, by the way, I should start selling.

"Fantasy worlds really are different! None of the old tricks work here. Manju is still tasty, though!"

"Are you listening to me—"

Jiggle jiggle.

We passed through the uninhabited ruins of the city. An unpopular, debris-ridden neighborhood, by the looks of it. If any old dudes appeared here, I'd set the mean girls and kobolds loose on them! That would be scarier than any nightmare. Even the kobolds were scared of the mean girls.

A group that had been following us all along started to creep outward and surround us. A group of thieves after money? Or maybe they had been hired by the nobles to go after the princess…or they could simply be horndogs trying to get a good look at the sexy dress? *Somehow, I feel like I could get along with the last group.*

"I think they might actually be good guys," I said. "Extreme horniness aside. Although, they do seem like they're readying attacks

without stopping to appreciate the sexy dress. Just walking around in that dress has gotta make you feel way too uncovered, right?"

"Then make me some normal clothes, for heaven's sake!"

"You two," came a voice. "Stop right there."

We were surrounded. Fine, no worries. Seventeen people…*seventeen old dudes!* They chewed up that event flag that I carefully, lovingly raised and spat it back in my face! *Time to smash those traitors!* Yeah, I'd smash them to little, tiny bits! Because that's what they did to my sweet sexy assassin dreams! I'd flog their asses for that!

"Who do you think you are? If you insist upon stopping someone in the middle of the road, at least say who you are!"

Royal Girl was pissed. Probably because all the old dudes kept muttering *Holy God looks so hot* as they stared at her dress with saucer-shaped eyes. I mean, it was hot. Like, scorching.

"It's her—Princess Shalliceres! Seize her!"

"Now that's a find!"

"We'll be rich, don't let 'em get away!"

Ah, they were the mercenary dogs of the noble old dudes. They were geezers, to boot.

"Tsk!"

Royal Girl easily batted away their swords, lowering her center of gravity and holding out her shield in a steady position. It was a good, wide stance—it allowed her to move quickly and respond to incoming attacks despite being surrounded on all sides. It also widened the slit in her dress, revealing the soft skin of her inner thigh. A wonderful stance!

"Uh, Haruka-sama? Enemies are attacking and you're squatting down to stare at my legs? Do you want to die?"

Die? Well, they were bad guys. Royal Girl would be able to handle 'em all. We *could* easily escape them. But like Royal Girl said before, these were nasty characters, experts at killing other people, so there was no point in even fighting back. So, might as well get captured and tied up. Yay?

“Haruka-sama, you coward! You—you didn’t even stop squatting before you got yourself captured! Get your face away from my legs!”

We got caught in a net, oh, and then chains, before I could even attack anyone. Which meant that we had no choice but to be squeezed tightly together in the same net. It was an act of God! I didn’t do anything wrong! Not my fault I was entangled in sweet legs. I just so happened to get captured when I was squatting nearby, and…*my God, these legs! They’re incredible!*

But Maid Girl’s sword was pointed right at my throat! Maid Girl was giving me the Sexy Outfit Maid Girl glare sesh. Getting stabbed would definitely hurt, but at least I had these legs for solace. I’d experienced happiness before the end. These were prime thighs!

“Would’ve been better without the armor, you know?” I said. “This is the event flag’s vengeance upon my soul. It was a sweet, short life. Delicious indeed. Y’know?”

“Kill the brat, but don’t injure the princess.”

A jet-black scythe whizzed over my head, revolving and rotating. The soul-hunting death scythe. Now there were two of them! Oh, and naturally, they sucked up every last penny from the pockets of their victims.

“How dare you!” I shouted. “You tore down my poor baby flag, my precious little darling. You’ll pay for your crimes!”

“*Who* is this guy?!”

“Who cares?”

While I was all tangled up with Royal Girl in the net, pressed together, kneading and chafing against one another in all kinds of delicious configurations, my death scythes took care of business. A voluptuous body heaved against me as the death scythes cut through their targets. A deadly waltz, a burial tango! Geezer bodies piled before us!

“Er, so I may have been a bit overexcited by a busty body, but my intuition is functioning as usual despite the scandalous situation, so I really can’t complain.”

With the scythes swinging us around, we bounced and squeezed against each other in all sorts of compromising positions. Her dress slipped

off her shoulder and fell to seductively expose the tops of her breasts; her skirt inched up her thighs and pressed her bare legs against my face. *You know, I don't know why, but I think I'm having a good day,* I thought, and decided to let the old dudes live. I only burned their heads a little. Thank you, deadly, delicious, scandalous, marvelous dance! Thank you!

"Who…who are you…?"

Bonk!

"That kid!"

Ker-plonk!

"Bastard…"

Shkabank!

"Urrrgh…"

Ker-slash?

"…"

Whap!

I quickly collected all of their wallets and valuables and put them in my item bag. Unfortunately, Maid Girl confiscated this delightful windfall, so that put the kibosh on my celebration. Oh well, I got plenty of items. And the net too, let's not forget! That was a good find.

"Why are you pillaging the bandits and just throwing everything into your own bag?!"

"W-well, that's good, right? I mean, they're thieves, right? They steal from normal people…so normal people steal from thieves. Right?"

"What? That doesn't make any sense."

How scandalous! She made it sound like I was the one who did something wrong. *They* were the bad guys, so that meant *I* was the good guy. That's just math. You couldn't spin it any other way, and if you did, I'd be the hero from that angle, too—I didn't do anything wrong! Because *they* were bad? And super old!

"Since when do normal people pillage thieves?! That just makes you a thief yourself! You need to be pillaged next!"

Well, since they were already out of commission, wasn't it noble to take care of their possessions? And yet I still got glared at. The two girls were body doubles, so twin glares! I explained to them in perfect logical language how rationally, I was the good guy in this scenario, and they were still disappointed, y'know? Something must be off with the translation feature in this world. Although, all my classmates glared at me in that exact same way. What a disappointing development: nobody present could comprehend my staggering genius. At least Class Rep always praised my reasoning as "utterly incomprehensible," so that just goes to show I'm… *Wait.* Is *that praise?*

"Now, who are we gonna wash next?"

"Don't tell me you want to rinse and repeat?!"

I'd made a serious profit. I just needed about fifty more groups of those guys to attack, and I'd have the riches of a lifetime! Yes, any time. Bring it! Of course, I'd much prefer to get attacked by a group of sexy female assassins. *I'm awaiting your arrival, ladies!*

DAY 62

NOON

Just because you're reading someone's thoughts doesn't mean you understand them.

NALLOGI CITY

"PLEASURE DOING BUSINESS!"

I mean, I couldn't be more grateful for getting attacked by strong nobles in possession of overwhelming items, equipment, and riches. Because I'd take it all from them and was bound to get hella stacks in return, obviously.

"I'd rather them attack all at once rather than one at a time. Oh! Oh! Maybe they could just put the money and equipment down in front of them and walk away. That would speed things up. Y'know? Ya feel? For real?"

They were all old as hell, so I didn't want to strip them of *everything* they had. That'd be kind of a bummer, right? It would be so easy for them to just take out all their valuables, put 'em down, and then drop dead then and there, but they weren't exactly a brain trust, here. Not like a threat, y'know?

"If I had to strip you guys of everything you had, at least you could do me a favor and become hot sexy assassins, seriously. What a bunch of lame, pathetic bandit guys."

We had already been attacked by hundreds of them, and yet I was still a long way away from getting rich. Plus, they were, like, seriously decrepit. What fantasy world was this, Old Dudetopia or something?

So obviously, they were toast. Probably because I whispered to Slimey that he could have as many snacks as he wanted if he wiped them out. And told Miss Armor Rep she could have a new hat if she wiped them out. Yeah, not even a contest.

"Haruka-sama, the next group is here…" sighed Royal Girl.

“Again? This is the eighteenth group!”

“Why do I feel bad for these bandits?” asked Maid Girl. “Why do I feel like *we’re* the villains?”

“Here they come… Ah, poor fellows.”

Hey! The old dudes that attacked us were *obviously* the bad ones. Don’t feel bad for bandits! And after that busty, swelling, curvaceous, deadly waltz-tango of a first battle, every battle after that had been boring. These were just doofy bandits.

Person-to-person combat skills were my weakness, since I couldn’t resist attacks from humans, and my stats were comparatively low. If they could stop me from moving and land a skill, or use a weapon that was guaranteed to hit, I could get killed in a second. Low stats were fatal in this world.

“Well, I do have a guardian Slime on my head, with the most powerful offensive and defensive prowess in the history of the universe—wait, he’s asleep?!”

Jiggle jiggzzzz…

I thought that these guys would make good practice, but I got bored fast. Who likes fighting grandpas?

“This is so lame!” I shouted. “Why have there been nothing but old dudes ever since coming here?! Can someone please explain this great geezer statistical improbability?!”

In all the light novels I’d read, you met exclusively hot babes in fantasy worlds…but here I was, facing down a never-ending old dude stampede!

It wasn’t fun, and I wasn’t getting rich, either. Getting attacked by bandits was a nasty business. Most of them didn’t have any valuables and suffered a horrible fate for nothing. I even offered to kick their butts in private, where nobody could see their shame, but they all declined. And there wasn’t a single sexy female assassin, sexy female bandit, sexy female swordfighter, or sexy female mage in the entire bunch! *I’m fed up with this world.*

At least I could take an occasional peep at the gaps in Royal Girl's sexy dress, which restored me instantly. It wasn't much fun getting threatened by Maid Girl at sword point every time, though.

"Getting attacked by bandits is less fun and lucrative than I expected. This sucks!"

I thought I'd be rich in no time. Alas!

"Why in the world would you think getting attacked by bandits would be fun and profitable to begin with!" cried Royal Girl. "Who told you that?"

"Don't tell me," said Maid Girl. "Is that the reason you accompanied us—you thought it'd be fun, and you'd get rich?! Is that why you were so excited to get attacked? How is that protecting us?!"

Hey, I do what I feel like, baby. Appreciating dynamite bodies in revealing dresses happens to be something I like. As does making ungodly amounts of money, but that just ain't in the cards for me today. The deck was stacked with old dudes.

"If they're all old dudes, I think it'd be faster to just burn the whole town down?"

"So, you're saying it's okay to kill them if they're old men?!"

"Yeah, there oughta be a law! You should make it happen—aren't you a princess? Make it illegal to waft old man stink at us or something?"

"What kind of tyrant do you take me for?!"

There was one enemy that did something a little different, but he was also an old dude, so that didn't make this any more fun. He didn't worry me, or anything. He *could* be an assassin? But he wouldn't approach.

"A dress this sexy and a body this busty fails to lure him…he must play for the other team! Oh no, I'm in trouble! Let's leave this to the old dudes—this place is dangerous! I'm outta here!"

And that's when he approached—all alone too, which meant he was confident in his skill. I didn't wanna be an old-man honey trap! Or what if I got honey trapped instead? Good God! A honey trap is a teenage boy's purest, happiest dream—I wouldn't forgive anyone who sullied it! Never!

“Hello, bandit slash assassin slash lover of sexy bodies slash old dude. Can I help you? Not that I’m offering. I’m not attracted at all, no. And why did you have to be old, anyway?”

“…Hmph.”

I could tell, this one was trouble. He was incredibly skilled and at a high level. After a short pause, he drew his sword, and came at me at an angle that was almost impossible for me to dodge or escape. He feinted for my head to aim for my feet, drawing and swinging in a single motion—this was bad. My Demon Scythes would be hopeless. I switched to the Universe Staff, activated Magic Entanglement, and went for him.

If I tried to retreat, he’d kill me.

He could completely read my movements. He perfectly understood every movement of the human body and the implications of any motion. It made sense that you could predict someone’s movement in a glance simply by analyzing their posture and positioning—that kind of skill was made for killing, and nothing else. But if killing was your aim, it was flawless. Too perfect, even. The perfect, unbeatable ability for slaughtering human beings.

I could barely avoid him. If I dodged, he’d drive me into a corner. My only choice was to attack…but with my low SPE stat, he immediately launched into a devastating slashing attack. I employed my most effective counter with my staff in hand. If he landed the blow, I’d die—he was that powerful.

As his sword came down, he perceived the future movement of my staff. It would get knocked away by his blade; from there, he would cut me down in an instant. His attack was timed and chosen perfectly. This was a professional killer—the strongest, most feared murderer of fellow human beings.

Bonk!

"Is he dead?"

I walloped him on the side of the head, and he collapsed. I mean, even *I* don't know where my attacks are going to end up, so even the perfect technique couldn't touch me.

"All my skills have friggin' question marks. I don't know how they work! There's no point in trying to read my movements. They're literally incomprehensible! Y'know?"

Jiggle jiggle…

That old dude was *too* good at reading his opponent's movements. But there was no way for him to predict that a staff swinging at him from head on would actually bonk him in the side. Who the hell had a hope of reading that? Even I was surprised!

"I wasn't expecting Teleport to activate either! I wasn't even thinking about it, so he couldn't have known… With all those question marks, I barely understand it myself. I don't know where I'm going or gonna end up! Sorry. Yeesh."

He was terrifying, but I was pure nonsense. He was invincible, but I was unreadable. I had no hopes of winning against him in a fair fight, but this fight was never fair. He never stood a chance.

"Th-that's Dajimakam! The deadliest assassin in the realm, known as the Blade Demon Dajimakam! He's a god of death! That means…goodness! The Arch Baron has become our foe."

"D-Dajimakam?! Meeting him is supposed to be as good as meeting Death! He's the most famous killer in the world—he's even taken down S-class adventurers! And you killed him in…one blow?"

He was buds with Maid Girl, apparently? And even Royal Girl had heard of him. He was just someone's grandpa, so I hadn't. I didn't care about old dudes. But he killed S-class adventurers? So that meant he could even kill people over level 100. That had to be the upper echelon of assassination prowess for sure. Nobody stood a chance against him. Except for me? I guess? I *am* still human, right? *Okay, it's still in my status. Thank*

God. Well, nothing was really *okay*, but I did check my stats from time to time just to confirm that the 'Human' race was still there.

"Yeah, that guy was one spooky dude," I said. "Right?"

"Well, yes, but…"

Cool, better off without him then. Out of my classmates, probably only Class Rep and Queen Bee could defeat him. Oh, and Vice Rep B. A few others might be able to squeak by, but at least half would get killed, for sure. Even the nerds might've gotten killed. The meatheads weren't human, so they were fine. The old dude's movements were about on par with the meatheads—that was the sheer depth and expertise of his human-slaying abilities. He wasn't even level 100, but he had mastered the art of murder.

"With the meatheads' instincts, they could probably hold out for five minutes? Their sheer athleticism would keep things at a draw, I bet."

It was obvious that this guy had to go. If I'd let him live, there was no telling how many people he might have killed. Once you were in his sights, there was no escape. I mean, he lived by killing people, so he understood that someone might kill him some day. Such was the nature of being a killer. I had killed someone before, so I knew. I knew…

Murderers don't need graves. So, I obliterated him. Graves are for remembering people by. Murderers like me are better off getting erased from existence. *And if you don't like that, then don't kill anyone. It's that easy.*

DAY 62

NOON

I have a quick errand, so do you need to see the name of the witness?

INTERLUDE: NALLOGI CITY

THE BLACK-HAIRED BOY, feared by gods and men. There were countless rumors about him. One said that his manner of speech was preposterously idiotic. But surely this boy could not be the same one from the rumor. While Princess Shalliceres appeared to have doubts about the boy's low level, he'd still won her trust.

But trust wasn't quite the same as finding the boy reliable.

There was no doubting his strength, however. I witnessed it firsthand. I completely concealed my presence using Shadow Cloak and used the Certain Kill attack Fell Supreme. I stabbed a poisoned blade from his blindside at his lower back. From that angle, it should've been impossible to dodge.

My sword vanished.

He'd taken it from me. Somehow, he snatched it out of my hands while I was activating Fell Supreme. Only a monster could do that.

Then…he saved my life. Yes, he was technically my savior. But we could not rely on him. A boy feared by the god of war Duke Meropapa was bound to be terrifying. He had cleared the monster forest… The commanding officers of the frontier army bowed to him. Relying on this boy was the worst possible thing we could do.

He was too willful. Too selfish. Too illogical. And he was too free. Nothing restrained him, nothing captured him—he simply lived his life by doing as he pleased. A monster freed from all its chains, living according to every whim and doing as it pleases, obeying its most selfish wants and desires…nothing could be more dangerous than such a monster.

Had I not known, I would never have even bothered paying attention to a level 20 boy. Wouldn't have even remembered him. How was I to know he was a monster? That he'd wiped out dungeons—many of them? That two undefeatable monsters served as his guard? He wasn't a murderer, but he could destroy our castle in the blink of the eye.

He had sweet inclinations, happy to help others. An amiable disposition. But he was not *good*, and he was anything but safe. I knew he didn't have a drop of ill will in his blood…well, besides his disgusting and utter perversion. He did not have an evil heart. He could have done whatever he wanted to me. He could've taken the princess. Instead, he just laughed. He didn't even recognize that I had just tried to kill him, because I hadn't even come close.

I wondered what would happen if someone managed to seriously anger him. Duke Omui had been destined to perish, so that outcome was guaranteed… Yes, in that scenario, the world would burn. But at least the frontier had experienced a final moment of happiness in that scenario. That was more than enough for a realm that hadn't had so much as a prayer. If the duchy did fall, at least the duke could look back with pride.

That lone boy contained unimaginable joy and terror in equal measure. He brought joy to the people, and terror to the monsters. And if he ever got it into his head to change course, he could destroy the entire kingdom.

I lived every moment for Princess Shalliceres. I saw myself as nothing more than a shadow bound for death. That principle was drilled into me ever since I was a girl. It was only natural that this boy would terrify me. Especially his simplicity.

I was even scared of myself—that he could make me smile. He could flick away the princess's blade with a gesture, and yet we bantered like peers. That was scary. The princess and I should have confronted death alone, but instead, alongside the boy, we ended up laughing. We steeled ourselves to face the might of the kingdom's army, just the two of us, but instead we faced it with three. We were safe. We dared to smile.

Death had become as natural a visitor as a smile or a bout of tears. That dispenser of death: Dajimakam. The fearsome legend, in the flesh. The name of Dajimakam was passed down through the generations, given to a

man with the powers of some distant God of Death. The one who bore that name was trained in the arts of killing from the moment they were born. And now, his throne had been usurped by a wayward foreigner.

The one known as Dajimakam learned all the arts of killing, how to end lives in every possible way. Murder was their very existence. Anyone he targeted met the same fate. He could read your movements, your mind; he was a Swordsmaster possessed of the ultimate, expert knowledge of assassination. If he tracked you down, you were done for. The best I could have done was sacrifice myself and pray that the Princess Shalliceres escaped.

But the boy stepped forward first. He didn't give it a second thought; he didn't even need to gird his loins. I realized I had to somehow put myself between them before the boy was killed…because you could not fight Dajimakam. You couldn't win. The God of Death would rob you of your life, and you would fall.

And yet, the God of Death fell in a single blow.

The God of Death, feared by the royals—never mind commoners and outsiders—fell in a single blow. The legend that stood at the pinnacle of human murder, beaten and laid low. Who *was* this boy? Who was more dangerous than the God of Death?

I watched the boy from behind as he proceeded to calmly destroy Dajimakam's body. The God of Death, broken like a powerless child. The boy glanced at me over his shoulder, and I saw him crying, trying to smile. Then, casually, he walked away. He didn't look back.

I was a shadow. *Doubt all but the princess; mistrust everyone but Her Highness.* But even I was powerless before the figure of this monstrous boy. From behind, he appeared as fleeting as a bubble on the surface of water. A passing shadow, a vanishing dream.

I was scared of myself. How many times had this boy had made me laugh? After repressing my emotions for my whole life, I was suddenly disarmed. I was supposed to devote my life to the princess!

I realized something. Even when he wasn't with us, the boy was shaping our lives. The hidden face of that boy was transforming the world. Just a boy passing through. A selfish, free, egotistical, incomprehensible

boy. An incomprehensible boy who coiled like a hissing snake whose strike paradoxically saved the frontier. One who obliterated the horrors of the realm like an interceding angel.

If you asked the city dwellers, they called him a hard worker and a servant to debauchery. If you asked shop owners, they declared him an idiot savant. If you asked the townsfolk, they said he was selfless. If you asked countryside villagers, they called him their savior. If you asked a customer, they called him a money-grubbing demon. If you asked children, they called him a millionaire who gave them treats. Ask a guild employee, they called him a sneaking monster, feared and respected by even veterans. You couldn't piece him together, not even by a study of a thousand other opinions on him. Still, everyone smiled to speak of him.

That sheer incomprehensibility terrified me. No one this frightening had ever passed through the kingdom, expelling the monsters of the rivers and forests, massacring the creatures of the night. Even those who asked him directly what his goals were came away confused. Anyone who tried to scrutinize his responses simply gave up before long. It all seemed so portentous and yet was so meaningless. Everyone complained about him, even as they smiled. He ran free across the land, leaving nonsense and mayhem in his wake. We knew the incomprehensible danger he posed, and yet we smiled. We were in the grip of madness.

He changed us. Without warning or noticing, against our wills, he'd *changed us.* And that was what frightened me. That was why I was so completely terrified—even in this moment when he was simply a crying child.

DAY 62

NOON

I prefer illegal dumpers in violation of the Antimonopoly and Fair Trade Act.

NALLOGI CITY

MINIMIZING THE DAMAGE from the brigands naturally resulted in a corresponding maximization of plunder from the brigands. We'd achieved synergy in our goods distribution infrastructure. And yet!

"Why aren't there any clumsy, beautiful female brigands around here?" I said. "I'd love to be attacked by some of those. No matter how patient I am, I don't get any good bandits at all."

"Please stop asking to be attacked so cheerfully, and stop being so happy when it happens!"

"I mean, what's even the point of throwing myself in the fray anymore if I don't get anyone good?" They were *soooo* old! "I tirelessly raise the sexy female-assassin event flag, time after time, flag after flag. And instead I get paid back in double decrepit dudes?! This endless sea of geezers stretches as far as the eye can see! And I can see pretty far! This is a country for old men!"

"You're supposed to be protecting us, so please stop pulling us into the middle of bandit formations? That's the exact opposite of protecting us! You're using us as bait!"

Yeah, I was! And they fell for it because they were slow.

"This is a first-come-first-serve business opportunity (for me) over here. You know that everyday real world expression 'it's a dog-eat-dog world?' It's just common sense, innit? And yet the bandits are so damn slow—in fact, so slow they're going backwards. They're runnin' away! How am I supposed to improve the economy if nobody will come to me? The newspapers are gonna say we're in a recession!"

Speaking of which, the economic articles in the newspapers weren't up to date! Oh well, they were a little over my head, anyway.

"This town doesn't have any restaurants, so let's go have lunch somewhere else. I wouldn't want to get surrounded by old dudes in the middle of eating, anyway! That would turn a barbecue into an old bloke-acue with all the old blokes I'd be roasting. Speaking of which, maybe I'll do barbecue tonight…"

Jiggle jiggle!

The rest of the bandits surrounding us didn't make a move. They were just a bunch of peeping perverts and monsters keeping their distance. I'm sure they had a few sins to confess—maybe just in their hearts, if they hadn't acted on them yet—but in the end, they were still old guys. I mean, old dudes and criminals weren't all that different. I'd do the same to them as I did to any monster—if they got in our way, we'd finish 'em off.

Ah, but apart from them, it was pretty peaceful here. Outside of the frontier, there were almost no dungeons that spawned monsters. No monster forest, either.

Unlike the frontier, which overflowed with magic and monsters, the rest of the kingdom was peaceful and lush. There were still monsters that attacked villages every once in a while, but their numbers never grew. If you hunted them, they wouldn't come back.

"So yeah, I've got these uncontrollable, overflowing pumpkin pie dealies and pumpkin chips growing, so eat up? They're yummy! Believe it!"

"Thank you very much!" Maid Girl and Royal Girl dug in.

As we ate, I heard about the full situation from them. Long story short, I was wasting my time. These weren't even scouts! They were just local bandit groups and mercenaries from minor lords that gathered around here. There were no profits to be made after all.

Well, at least all my recent bandit-hunting had some benefits. The merchants would be able to conduct their business more smoothly. But that assassin… Daddy Malcolm? Was that his name? Well, that old dude had probably been sent here to take out the princess. A lone assassin! No wonder he'd failed. I thought they were trying to capture her, not kill her.

To be fair, some of the slightly-better-dressed old dudes had also tried to capture the princess, so maybe they were split into two groups? The old dudes and the older dudes? Eh, whatever, they're old and they're dudes. Same diff.

Apparently, the assassin was sent by the first prince, while the mercenaries who tried to capture the princess were sent by the nobles. So, which was old and which was older? Not that it mattered. Like…ew?

"They didn't work together, and the inconsistent orders from their higher-ups probably made it harder for them to achieve their objectives. We just pick them off one at a time."

"Don't you have *any* intentions of even attempting to negotiate?!"

I don't know anything about the military, but I'm pretty sure the goal is to take out the opposing general. Right? In this case it was the first prince, or the pimp king's son. He had to be the dude who looked like a pimp, right? I knew the king looked like a pimp, so it stood to reason all his kids looked that way, too. *Pretty easy to tell who's who when they're that flashy.*

"Slimey, if you eat those royals you'll get the skill Pimp, so make sure not to eat them. It'd be jiggly justice, but pimping ain't easy, so it's off the table. 'Kay?"

Jiggle jiggle!

I didn't need pimps, and certainly not a Pimp skill. Thank god Slimey didn't eat him. I was having trouble imagining what a Pimp Slime would look like (only a sketchy impression). I kind of didn't like the idea? *What would I do if Slimey wasn't cute anymore?!*

"Yo, Royal Girl, whaddaya wanna do? It was a good strategy, so let's just execute it. You feel?"

"It was my intention to halt the army. Should he refuse to listen, we would then settle matters with a one-on-one battle."

Oh, hard pass. I did hear that she studied sword-fighting and military tactics under Mr. Meridad, so I hadn't hoped for much. But no wonder her strategy was to just charge in and pray. Did you need to study to do that?

Waiting in the town would suck ass, given that it was a totally derelict ghost town with nothing but empty houses, abandoned shops, and old geezers. Looking at the map I got from Stalker Girl, if we continued down this road there was a village. We could head there…? Although if we went that far, there's no way Royal Girl would turn back. Should we stay or should we go?

"Maid Girl, are there any airship monsters left? I'm bored! I want to try riding one, and walking is lame. I think there were these round, floating bats. Any more of those guys still around?"

"All the infiltrating monsters have been apprehended by the frontier," Maid Girl said. "There may be some left in the capital, but none that we would be able to get our hands on. And don't ride them just because you're bored! Those monsters are incredibly valuable!"

So she didn't know, I guess. I decided to just follow Royal Girl for the time being. The slit in her dress provided an entertaining view, after all, revealing a peep of white, smooth, muscular inner thigh with every step! I could follow that for the rest of my days. The only problem was a shadow glaring at me the whole time. I see you, furious glare!

"Even Slimey is bouncing around, bored out of his brains. Can't some sweet, sexy female pirates come and serenade us? Make it worth my while?"

Response: glares. Life or Death Glares storming out at me from the Royal Girl and her Maid Girl shadow. *What crazy skill is this?!* But seriously, they said it was going to take ten days on foot to meet up with the main force. That was *sooooo* long from now! All the forces hadn't even gathered yet. What kind of strategy was it to wait for them to finish gathering? Why would we let them do that?

We could be in trouble if another, separate division attacked the frontier while we were on our way, too. But Miss Armor Rep and Murimuri Castle should be more than enough to hold them off, especially after she finished the latest round of pseudo-dungeon upgrades. I didn't think most ordinary folk could wage war after a bout with that dungeon. That meant all that was left was to lie in wait. But it'd be ages before they got here, and using Clairvoyance only showed a faint cloud of dust… Horses, running towards us?

“Royal Girl, there are horses coming. Do you happen to know them? They seem to be running this way at a galloping pace. You can see a cloud of dust, so it’s like they’re racing or something? They could vanish at any moment, but they’d vanish with all their running, galloping might, so I guess you can’t really lose them.”

“Horses… You mean to say they’re horseback knights? Are there no signs of flags or armor? Ceres, my weapon!”

“Yes, milady!”

Hmmmmmm. Well, they were still far away. They appeared to be some manner of horses engaged in some sort of running activity. Wait, a banner? No, that was a red cross… Wait, *the* Red Cross?!

“Let’s see, there’s some weird flag-like apparatus painted with a kind of red rhombus on a white background sort of thing? Swift as a coursing river, all the force of a great typhoon… Maybe we can stop them with a raging fire and the dark side of the moon?”

“The Red Rhombus. How did my little brother make it this far?! I-impossible. We must rescue him! He must have enemies after him!”

“His Royal Highness acts as representative of the kingdom. There’s no way he should be away from the capital. Something’s not right.”

I mean, they were *seriously* booking it, so maybe someone was in hot pursuit. With the cloud of dust and whatnot I couldn’t see behind them. But if the representative of the kingdom was under attack…just how messed up *was* this place?

Well, when the line of succession is undecided, princes mysteriously fall ill, get sick, wind up dead, and get attacked, and lead uprisings, and start civil wars, and all that. How did they have any time left over for attacking the frontier? The kingdom would collapse without spellstones, though, so I supposed they had no choice.

“There aren’t any flags behind them, but I do see green armor with a white mark. Hmmm, it looks like they’re getting chased, but all I can sense is a high density of old dudes. I guess I’ll light them up.”

“A white line on dark green…those are the church’s soldiers! How are they here? That marks the Theocracy’s anti-beastfolk faction—how did

they get into the kingdom? And why are they attacking the young prince?! Is this…is this war?"

Theocracy? Those were the old dude's peeps, yeah? The prince *might* be our ally, but the church was definitely our enemy. They called the frontier a poisoned land and operated a brutal anti-fair-trade monopoly to coopt all the spellstones for the sake of "purification" or whatever.

They'd also declared that at the bottom of the Ultimate Dungeon lay a devil woman who must be sealed away for all eternity, so I didn't think they were very nice. They sure liked to righteously do their weird justice in the name of some god or other. I'd be happy to justly, righteously slaughter them and send them to whatever old fellow's white room they thought came after all this. That woman they hated was left alone in the darkness for an eternity, and struggled and fought her way through to emerge as Angelica. So if she was evil, that made me an ally of evil, right? Yeah, trash like that deserved to be burnt. I'd break their monopoly all the way to that white room and slam the door on 'em and their god. People sure love God—but it's a one-sided deal, if you ask me. Personally, I say it's time to bring God down to earth. *God* was the guy screwing with our happiness down here.

"Oh, we should call in the nerds," I said. "If they're calling beastfolk foul creatures, that means there are probably enslaved beastfolk and all that jazz. They certainly won't let that stand. They *love* animal ears, and they'll go to town on any animal-ear abusers, I'll tell you that."

Jiggle jiggle.

If the nerds got their hot hands on beastfolk, I doubted that we'd ever see them again. I'd give them an amiable and courteous one-way vacation to the land of the old God dude. *The results are priceless! Just pay me in advance!*

◆

AFTERWORD

◆

I'M STILL NOT USED to this, but here's my afterword, which still hardly feels worthy of publication.

Thank you for buying this book and for reading it, from the bottom of my heart. Try not to burn it, if you'd be so kind.

Here I am, writing another afterword I don't deserve. But I do need to thank Enomaru-san for their fantastic illustrations. The entire editing department got excited over them! Thanks also to Ouraidou-sama for ensuring that none of the myriad typos and omitted words in my manuscript found their way to publication, and to the countless individuals online who helped edit my story as well.

This is the part where I thank my editor, who handled one hundred percent of everything. But thanking them would take so long that I would have no space left by the end, leaving this afterword as empty as a serving of sugar-free cotton candy. Still, thanks to their endless efforts (and thanks to an invoice that pays by the page), we were able to shave and shave and shave and revise the story down until it fit inside these covers. On the off-chance that this is the last volume we publish, then all you need to know is that the constant feedback from my fearless editor Y-san is: "Too many pages. :P"

"40 characters per line, 18 lines per page, 368 pages, MAX," were the explicit instructions that I received, so I reduced as I revised, wrote as I reduced, and so on…which somehow resulted in me going under word count and needing to write five-page-long afterwords for the previous volumes. Oops.

I had to chop off five pages, so there went another 3,600 words and 90 columns. Enough to bring tears to my eyes. But with my unusual way of writing, it's incredibly difficult to get the page count right. It can feel like trying to find one specific thing in a home goods center. It's only right for

me to extend my courtesy and gratitude and profound apologies in this afterword, just as a matter of routine.

And so, the fact that an afterword that shouldn't have gotten published is so long is pretty peculiar. Afterwords are bizarre and terrifying and Polnareffian to begin with, I must admit. I wrote this afterword assuming that it wouldn't get used, but instead I have to edit it down it *and* publish it… It's a miracle that we don't need to write a thank-you note to the knife and gun shop as well.

Also, now with the release of the 5th volume of the manga in Japan, I'd like to offer my deepest thank you to Bibi-san and Comic Gardo.

Now that I've vamped for a while, that brings us to two pages if my calculations are correct. But I can't help but to worry about what I'll do if they tell me I need to cut it down to one. There's also the possibility that they ask me to write a third page, but they really shouldn't publish this afterword to begin with. And yet I get the feeling they will, so thank you so much for getting to the end.

—SHOJI GOJI

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